The Power of Feminist Theory

Domination, Resistance, Solidarity

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A Feminist Conception of Power

Each of the theorists whom we have considered up to this point offers a distinct set of contributions to a feminist conception of power. Foucault's genealogy of power provides a compelling alternative to juridical accounts that assume that power is fundamentally repressive, that it always functions by saying no. By contrast, Foucault claims that power is inherently productive, and that its productive and repressive aspects are complexly intertwined; thus, power produces by repressing and represses by producing. Because one of the key effects of power is the subject, this dialectic of production and repression is also evident in Foucault's account of subjection: One is both subject to power and at the same time able to take up the position of a subject in and through power. Thus, Foucault's account of power offers an insight that is lacking in many of the feminist discussions of power that I discussed in Chapter 1: namely, that the domination and the empowerment of an individual are complexly intertwined. However, despite the brilliance of Foucault's conceptual insight into the functioning of power, his analysis is plagued by a series of problems. He fails to make normative distinctions between different uses of power and, as a result, ends up painting power as the night in which all cows are black; he neglects to make good on his aim of integrating a genealogical analysis of power with a genealogy of resistance; and he views power in solely strategic terms, the result of which is a blindness to relations of solidarity. But, from a conceptual standpoint, the most serious problem of all is the paradox of agency that emerges out of his analysis of subjection: If we are always subjects in the sense of being subjected to myriad repressive power relations, then in what sense can we be said to have the capacity to act at all? And, on the flip side, if we are always subjects in the sense of having the capacity to act, then in what sense can we be said to be constrained by social forces?

Judith Butler's Foucaultian-feminist conception of power offers a solution to this conceptual problem. By integrating the Derridean notion of citationality or iterability into the Foucaultian account of subjection, Butler offers an account of what it is that mediates between the two poles of subjection. In this way, Butler resolves the Foucaultian paradox of agency. In her view, subjects are compelled to cite the sex/gender norms that constrain them. Since the norms must be cited by subjects in order to be reproduced, it cannot be the case that we are completely determined by them; but since we are compelled to cite the norms in some way or another, neither are we completely unconstrained by social forces. However, Butler's analysis has its own limitations. On the one hand, unlike Foucault, Butler focuses too narrowly on the discursive as the dimension through which power is exercised and reproduced; thus, she subsumes all aspects of social and cultural life under the umbrella of discourse. On the other hand, like Foucault, Butler explicitly avoids making the kinds of normative distinctions between harmful and beneficial uses of power; and, also like Foucault, she seems to presume a strategic conception of power that renders her analysis blind to relations of solidarity.

By contrast, Hannah Arendt conceives of power fundamentally in communicative rather than strategic terms; thus, her conception provides an excellent starting point for a reexamination of solidarity. In this way, Arendt's analysis of power addresses a major conceptual lacuna of the analyses of Foucault and Butler. Further, the analysis of solidarity that can be gleaned from Arendt's work escapes Butler's criticism that solidarity is an exclusionary norm predicated on a problematic sameness or identity. However, Arendt's analysis falls prey to limitations precisely the opposite of those encountered by Foucault and Butler. First, whereas Foucault and Butler fail to provide a sufficient normative framework for their analyses of power and, thus, fall into normative confusions, the core of Arendt's conception of power is the normative ideal of reciprocity or mutuality. However, Arendt fails to reconcile this normative core with her admission of the fact that power might emerge out of group interactions that are normatively problematic. Thus, Arendt tends to paint too rosy a picture of power; in so doing, she falls into a different sort of normative confusion. In other words, whereas Foucault's and Butler's analyses of power suffer because of their presupposition that power is always and only strategic, Arendt's analysis suffers from the opposite presupposition—the assumption that power is always and only communicative. This leads to the second limitation of Arendt's analysis of power: Whereas Arendt's conception is quite useful for theorizing the positive collective empowerment of feminist actors, it is less helpful for theorizing the systemic relations of domination against which such actors struggle.

In this concluding chapter, I offer a conception of power that attempts to weave together the insights of these three theorists, while avoiding the pitfalls and lacunae of their respective analyses. Drawing on the insights into power gleaned from my analyses of Foucault, Butler, and Arendt, I introduce a conception of power that can illuminate domination, resistance, and solidarity and that highlights the complex ways in which they are interrelated. Drawing on Foucault and Butler, my account emphasizes the dialectical relationships between subjects who are endowed with the capacity to act and the discursive and nondiscursive forces to which they are subjected. Furthermore, drawing on Arendt, this account emphasizes the mutual and reciprocal interactions among subjects (in the dual sense of the term). Moreover, in order to avoid the normative confusions that plague Foucault, Butler, and Arendt, I reject the presupposition that power is either inherently strategic (and thus normatively suspect) or inherently communicative (and thus normatively beneficial); instead, I offer normative distinctions between different modalities of power.

In what follows, I begin by considering in detail the kinds of interests that feminists bring to the study of power. From these interests, I derive the definitions of some key "power terms,"[1] definitions that I then situate vis-à-vis other influential conceptions of power. In the final section, I offer some methodological considerations for how best to go about studying power as I have defined it. These methodological exhortations take the form of a series of analytic perspectives from which power should be viewed.

Defining Power

Myriad different, and in many cases contradictory, definitions of power are influential in contemporary social and political theory. In fact, the lack of agreement amongst social and political theorists about how to define power has led some to abandon the hope of arriving at a widely accepted definition. As Steven Lukes puts the point: "It is more likely that the very search for such a definition is a mistake. For the variations in what interests us when we are interested in power run deep . . . , and what unites the various views of power is too thin and formal to provide a generally satisfying definition, applicable to all cases."[2] In light of this serious and ongoing debate, I must emphasize at the outset that I am not attempting to offer a "generally satisfying definition" of power that will be "applicable to all cases." Rather, my aim is to offer an analysis of power that will prove useful for feminist theorists who seek to comprehend, critique, and contest the subordination of women.[3]

With that in mind, let us return to the question that I posed in the Introduction: "What interests feminists when we are interested in power?"

Feminists bring at least three particular interests to a study of power. The first and perhaps the most striking is our interest in understanding the ways men dominate women, an interest that remains the impetus of much feminist research. Furthermore, the exposure in recent years of the racial and class bias of much of feminist theory has signaled the need for feminists to think seriously about how some women dominate others on the basis of their race, class, ethnicity, age, or sexual orientation.[4] A feminist conception of power thus needs to be able to illuminate a complex and interrelated array of systems of domination—an array including sexism, racism, heterosexism, and class oppression, to name only the most conspicuous dimensions. These related concerns require an adequate feminist analysis of power to shed light on the concept of domination more generally.

However, as noted by some of the feminists reviewed in Chapter 1, a discussion of domination will not satisfy all the interests that feminists have in studying power. As I argued in that chapter, to think of power solely in terms of domination leads one to neglect the power that women do have. This neglect, in turn, leads some feminists not only to underemphasize the ways that some women are in positions of dominance over others but also to overemphasize the ways that women are victimized. The recognition of these inadequacies gives rise to a second feminist concern with power: our interest in understanding the power that women do have—that is, empowerment.

This need to theorize the power that women retain in spite of masculine domination often manifests itself in a concern with a specific use to which empowerment can be put—namely, resistance. If the interest in empowerment corresponds to the concern with the power that women exercise in spite of male domination, then the interest in resistance corresponds to feminists' concern with the power that women can wield to oppose male domination. In other words, whereas the feminist interest in empowerment arises out of the need to theorize the power that women have *in spite of* the power that men exercise over us, the interest in resistance emerges out of the need to understand the power that women exercise specifically *as a response to* such domination.

The third interest that feminist theorists bring to the discussion of power comes in the wake of charges that the mainstream feminist movement has marginalized women of color, lesbians, and working-class women. In response to this charge, feminists must be able to think about the kind of power that a diverse group of women can exercise collectively when we work together to define, and strive to achieve, feminist aims. That is, we have an interest in theorizing the kind of collective power that can bridge the diversity of individuals who make up the feminist movement. This interest in collective power also arises out of our

need to understand how feminists can build coalitions with other social movements, such as the racial equality movement, the gay rights movement, and/or new labor movements. In short, we need a theory of power that can conceptualize solidarity. Moreover, not just any conception of solidarity will do; we shall have to formulate our conception in such a way that it is able to avoid the charge that solidarity is an exclusionary and repressive concept that is always predicated on some inherent sameness or identity.

In sum, then, a feminist conception of power must be able to make sense of masculine domination, feminine empowerment and resistance, and feminist solidarity and coalition-building. Yet these different sorts of power relations do not all fall under the same sense of the general term *power*. Rather, each of them represents a particular way of exercising power. Our interest in domination is in the particular kinds of power that men are able to exercise *over* women. Our interest in empowerment and resistance is in the power that women have *to* act in spite of or as a response to such domination. Our interest in solidarity and coalition-building is in the power that feminists exercise *with* each other and with men in allied social movements. Feminists' diverse interests in the study of power thus give rise to three basic senses of *power* that our conception will have to illuminate: power-over, power-to, and power-with. Before we can arrive at a conception that will allow us to think of domination, empowerment/resistance, and solidarity/coalition-building together as instances of power—and, more important, that will allow us to analyze these instances in their interrelatedness—we must first consider each of these different senses of the term *power* in itself.

Power-Over

I shall define *power-over* as the ability of an actor or set of actors to constrain the choices available to another actor or set of actors in a nontrivial way. This definition is similar to Thomas Wartenberg's definition of power-over: "A social agent A has *power over* another social agent B if and only if A strategically constrains B's action-environment."[5] I have omitted *strategically* from my definition of power-over because it seems to imply that those who have power over others have that power intentionally.[6] The difficulty with an account that sees power-over as the result of an actor's strategy or intentions is that it ignores the ways one can, as Lukes puts it, "have or exercise power without deliberately seeking to do so, in routine or unconsidered ways, without grasping the effects [one] can or do[es] bring about."[7] It strikes me as particularly important for feminists to define power-over without reference to strategies or intentions because much of the power that men exercise over women is exercised "in

routine or unconsidered ways" by men who do not deliberately intend to do so. Indeed, not only is power over women exercised by men who do not deliberately intend to do so, but I would argue that it is even exercised by men who deliberately intend *not* to do so. This is so because, whatever their intentions, these men are still acting within a set of cultural, institutional, and structural relations of power that work to the advantage of dominant groups and to the disadvantage of women and other subordinated groups.[8]

One aspect of my definition of power-over needs clarification—namely, the phrase "in a nontrivial way." In some cases, an agent constrains the choices of another in ways that we would hesitate to call exercises of power at all. If two people each have a craving for chocolate, and one eats the last brownie in the house, then she has constrained the other's options for fulfilling his or her chocolate craving. In a broad spectrum of cases, this constraint seems too trivial to consider an instance of power-over. However, if one who eats the brownie is well-fed and the other is severely malnourished, then this action could well be viewed as an exercise of power-over. There is no general rule here; the claim that an actor or set of actors exercises power over another or others will depend to some extent on the context.

Before I go on to define *domination* and consider its relation to the more general sense of power-over, let me situate my definition with respect to other ways of conceptualizing power-over. First, my definition is broad enough to include both decisions and nondecisions.[9] An actor may constrain the choices of another either by making a direct decision that he or she will have to accommodate or by intentionally or unintentionally maintaining a course of action that limits the set of options from which he or she will be able to choose. Second, this definition covers both overt behavior and anticipated reactions: An actor's options can be constrained both by the overt behavior of another and by his or her anticipation of the other's negative reaction to some subset of his or her options.[10] Third, because it makes no mention of the articulated interests of either party, this definition can account for power-over relations that disadvantage actors with respect to both their avowed interests and those interests we believe them to have that they do not avow.[11] Finally, by conceptualizing power-over as a constraint on an actor's or set of actors' options, this definition avoids conceiving of power solely on a dyadic or interventional model.[12] In other words, this definition allows us to theorize both the power that actors wield in particular relationships and the power that such actors wield by virtue of the cultural, social, institutional, and structural relations within which each of their particular relationships takes shape. Thus, this definition accords with the basic insight—shared by Foucault, Butler, and Arendt—that power is fundamentally relational.

Although domination represents one way of exercising power over others, the terms *domination* and *power-over* cannot be simply synonymous. We can easily think of situations in which one agent constrains the choices available to others in a nontrivial way that we would hesitate to call instances of domination. For example, a basketball coach exercises a certain amount of power over her players: She has the ability to constrain their options as basketball players in nontrivial ways by deciding what will happen at practice, who will play which position, who will start the game, and so on. However, we would hesitate to say that being a coach necessarily involves dominating one's players, although some coaches may use their position in this way. On the contrary, coaches are there to help their players develop new skills, increase their confidence, and, if all goes well, experience the pleasure of victory in competition.[13] Each of these goals points to a use of power-over others that is not harmful, and that does not seem to capture what feminists mean by domination. Therefore, *power-over* must be a broader concept than *domination*. Furthermore, this example indicates that the former can be distinguished from the latter by means of a normative criterion: Coaching is not an instance of domination because the power the coach has over her players is exercised for their benefit, rather than for their disadvantage. Thus, we might define *domination* with reference to a normative criterion as well: Domination entails the ability of an actor or set of actors to constrain the choices of another actor or set of actors in a nontrivial way and in a way that works to the others' disadvantage.[14] Domination thus turns out to be a particular application of power understood as power-over.

Power-To

However, power-over is not the only sense of power that our conception needs to be able to illuminate.[15] After all, resistance and empowerment cannot be understood best as instances of power-over. Rather, these terms seem to describe the capacity of an agent to act in spite of or in response to the power wielded over her by others. As I discussed in Chapter 1, most feminists who view power in terms of empowerment consider this conception of power explicitly to contradict the masculinist definition of power as a dominating and controlling power over others.[16] Nor is the notion of resistance fully illuminated by power-over as defined here; although particular instances of resistance may take the form of placing constraints on the options of the would-be aggressor, resistance seems fundamentally to involve asserting one's capacity to act in the face of the domination of another agent.

If we understand empowerment and resistance in this way, then we can see that they are not completely captured by the term *power-over*. The

feminist interest in empowerment and resistance accordingly requires that we understand power in a second sense: the sense of power-to. I define *power-to* as the ability of an individual actor to attain an end or series of ends.[17] This way of defining power-to suggests that the terms *empowerment* and *power-to* are roughly synonymous. Feminists are interested in empowerment because we are interested in how members of subordinated groups retain the power to act despite their subordination—more particularly, in our ability to attain certain ends in spite of the subordination of women. This is an interest in power understood as power-to.

However, *power-to* or *empowerment* cannot be considered equivalent to *resistance*. Just as I can assert my power-to act as a response to a system of domination, I can conceivably assert my power-to act by dominating others.[18] Thus, in the same way that domination represents a particular way of exercising power-over, resistance seems to represent a particular way of exercising power-to or empowerment. We can define resistance as the ability of an individual actor to attain an end or series of ends that serve to challenge and/or subvert domination. In order to accommodate the feminist interest in resistance, our conception of power must cover power-to as well.

Power-With

To satisfy the feminist interest in solidarity, our definition will also have to include a final sense of power. Feminists are interested in solidarity because we have an interest in understanding the kind of collective power that binds the feminist movement together and allies it with other social movements in such a way that we can formulate and achieve our goals. I take it that the goal of the feminist movement is not to put women in a position to exact at long last our revenge for the suffering we have endured under a heteropatriarchal society. Thus, it does not make sense to view the solidarity that enables the feminist movement to formulate and achieve its objectives as merely an instance of power-over.[19] Rather, the goal is a kind of collective empowerment. Moreover, because solidarity represents a *collective* empowerment, it is not completely described by power-to, as I have defined it. If solidarity cannot be viewed as a way of exercising either power-over or power-to, feminists require a third sense of power—namely, power-with.

Power-with is the sense that emerges out of Arendt's definition of power as "the human ability not just to act but to act in concert."[20] Understood in this way, power is a collective ability that results from the receptivity and reciprocity that characterize the relations among individual members of the collectivity.[21] Drawing on these aspects of Arendt's understanding of power, we can offer the following definition of power-

with: the ability of a collectivity to act together for the attainment of an agreed-upon end or series of ends.

However, *solidarity* and *power-with* cannot be considered equivalent terms. For example, a military group that is unjustly exercising power over a population by imposing martial law can be said to be exercising power-with. In fact, this collective power-with may well be what allows the military to maintain its position of dominance. Yet this does not completely correspond to the kind of solidarity in which feminists are interested. Thus, just as we concluded that domination is a particular way of exercising power-over and resistance a particular way of exercising power-to, solidarity should be understood as a particular way of exercising power-with. With that in mind, I define solidarity as the ability of a collectivity to act together for the agreed-upon end of challenging, subverting, and, ultimately, overturning a system of domination.

Having started with what interests feminists when we are interested in power, we have arrived at three desiderata for a general definition of power: It will have to include power-over, power-to, and power-with. To satisfy these desiderata, our definition of power will have to be quite broad. Thus, I will define power simply as the ability or capacity of an actor or set of actors to act. This rather broad definition has two benefits. First, it easily includes all three of the senses of power that I have delineated. Power-over is the ability or capacity to act in such a way as to constrain the choices available to another actor or set of actors; power-to is the individual ability or capacity to act so as to attain some end; and power-with is the collective ability or capacity to act together so as to attain some common or shared end. Because it can include power-over, power-to, and power-with, our definition can accommodate feminists' interests in understanding domination, resistance, and solidarity. The second benefit of this definition is that it accords nicely with the etymology of the term: *Power* is derived from the Latin *potere* and the French *pouvoir*, both of which mean *to be able*.

Defining power in this way, however, does have its drawbacks, the most significant of which is that many social and political theorists define it differently. Many theorists equate power with only one of the three senses that I have delineated, usually power-over.[22] But although my definition does not capture all aspects of standard usage, it is better suited than others to the interests that feminists bring to the study of power. If we want to satisfy these interests, we have to define power in such a way.

Another potential objection to defining power in this way is that it seems to privilege one of the three senses of power that I have distinguished—namely, power-to. If power is defined as the ability or capacity to act, then it is barely distinguishable from power-to, which is defined as the individual ability or capacity to act so as to attain some end. This

might seem to cause problems for my argument in Chapter 1. There, I argued that power cannot simply be equated with empowerment or power-to; yet my own definition might seem to understand power in precisely that way. Thus, it seems that I have sided with the empowerment theorists after all.

Yet I have not, in this broad definition, simply sided with the empowerment theorists. My argument in Chapter 1 against the power-as-domination and power-as-empowerment models was that each of these conceptions yields a one-sided view of power. It was never my contention that the empowerment theorists have a wholly incorrect understanding of power; I claimed only that their understanding is incomplete because they tend to view their conception of power *in opposition to* the view held by the domination theorists. The following passage from Held is instructive in this regard:

> The relation between mothering person and child . . . yields a *new view* of power. We are accustomed to thinking of power as something that can be wielded by one person over another, a means by which one person can bend another to his will. . . . But consider now *the very different view* of power in the relation between the mothering person and child. The superior power of the mothering person is useless for most of what she aims to achieve in bringing up the child. The mothering person seeks to empower the child to act responsibly; she neither wants to "wield" power nor to defend herself against the power "wielded" by the child.[23]

In this passage, Held presents the conception of power as empowerment as radically different from a conception that defines power as a form of power-over, or, more specifically, as domination.

I contend that it makes no sense to think of these two conceptions of power as opposed to one another. As Foucault and Butler argue quite persuasively, domination and empowerment are always intertwined with respect to the subject; one is always subject to relations of domination and yet simultaneously empowered to take up the position of a subject in and through that subjection. Moreover, these different modalities of power are not just interrelated in practice, they are conceptually interrelated. Exercising power-over always presupposes exercising power-to: In order to exercise power over another, one must exercise power in the sense of the capacity or ability to act in such a way as to attain some end. Similarly, exercising power-with presupposes exercising power-to: For a group to exercise power in the sense of the collective capacity to act so as to attain some agreed-upon end, the individual members of that group must also exercise power in the sense of the individual capacity to act so as to attain some end. Although power-to is the most basic of the three

senses that I have delineated, it is not opposed to either power-over or power-with.

This conceptual interrelatedness brings out an important aspect of my account of power: In my view, power-over, power-to, and power-with are not best understood as distinct *types* or *forms* of power; rather, they represent analytically distinguishable *features* of a situation. Just as Arendt noted that, despite the careful analytical distinctions she draws among violence, power, authority, and strength, all of these phenomena may be present in the same situation, I acknowledge that although power-over, power-to, and power-with are analytically distinguishable features of a situation, they may all be present in one interaction. For instance, an action that is made possible by collective power-with necessarily presupposes the power-to of individual members of the collectivity and may also be used as a means to achieving power over others. The feminist struggle over the Equal Rights Amendment provides a nice illustration of this point. In their struggle to pass the ERA, a group of individual actors worked together to achieve the agreed-upon goal of passing a constitutional amendment that, had it passed, would have constrained the options of those who were in a position to or wanted to discriminate against women. The advantage of the definition of power that I have sketched out is that it provides a set of analytical tools that can help us make sense of the complex power relations at work in such a situation.

Methodological Considerations

I began this chapter by asking the question "What interests feminists when we are interested in power?" In the previous section, I offered a definition of the concept of power that was designed to address those interests. I argued that feminists need a conception of power that can illuminate power-over, power-to, and power-with, because only such a theory will be able to satisfy feminists' diverse interests in understanding domination, resistance, and solidarity.

The next step is to sketch out a methodological approach to the study of power that will enable us to theorize domination, resistance, and solidarity, and the ways in which they are interrelated. Elucidating the interplay between each of these ways of exercising power is crucial because only such an integrative approach will be complex enough to make sense of the multiple and overlapping power relations within which we women find ourselves. In the remainder of this chapter, I shall map out a series of analytic perspectives on power that are designed to help illuminate the multifarious relations of domination, resistance, and solidarity with which feminists are concerned.

The two primary analytic perspectives from which feminists ought to be able to view power relations are what I will call the *foreground perspective* and the *background perspective*. The foreground perspective targets particular power relations between individuals or groups of individuals. One might, for example, adopt this analytic perspective to examine the particular instance of domination that exists when a husband is physically abusive to his wife, or when the wife resists her husband's abuse, or when a feminist group on a college campus collectively protests domestic violence. The background perspective, on the other hand, focuses on the background social conditions that allow these particular power relations to appear. It examines the subject-positions, cultural meanings, practices, institutions, and structures that make up the context within which particular power relations are able to emerge. From this perspective, one would be able to understand how a particular case of wife battery is made possible by the background subject-positions of "wife" and "husband"; by cultural definitions of masculinity and femininity; by certain habitual social practices; by the institutions of marriage, the judiciary, and the police; and by structural patterns of advantage and disadvantage between men and women—all of which create and continually reinforce the subordination of women. Similarly, one would be able to see how a wife's resistance to such domination and a feminist group's collective protest are made possible by an alternative set of background subject-positions, cultural meanings, practices, and so on.

The Foreground Perspective

From the foreground perspective, the aim is to describe the power relation that exists between individuals or discrete groups of individuals. Thus, with respect to domination, from this perspective one could examine how, for example, a particular husband is able to dominate his wife through physical force, emotional manipulation, coercion, intimidation, and the like. Similarly, from this perspective, one could study the ways in which the wife is able to resist her abusive husband by, for instance, going to a shelter for battered women, pressing charges against him, or calling a divorce lawyer. Finally, one could study the solidarity that emerges out of collective protests against violence against women in such arenas as "Take Back the Night" marches and out of the collective action that leads to the founding of shelters for battered women.

However, an analysis that viewed power solely from the foreground perspective would be incomplete and inadequate for two reasons. First, a particular power relation, studied in isolation from its cultural, practical, institutional, and structural context, is easily perceived as an anomaly. Thus, for example, viewed solely from the foreground perspective, a par-

ticular case of wife battery may seem to be merely the product of a bad relationship or a violent temper, and not part of the larger system of the subordination of women. Second, there is a high degree of interplay between the relations highlighted by foreground and background perspectives. On the one hand, the particular power relations that are the focus of the foreground perspective always occur in the context of a set of background social relations that shape the expectations, choices, and beliefs of the individuals involved. On the other hand, these particular power relations themselves help to shape and mold the set of social relations that are the focus of the background perspective; indeed, in some sense, these social relations are just the accumulated or sedimented effects of a bunch of particular power relations. Thus, the foreground/background distinction is an analytical one; it is a distinction between different angles to take when one studies power relations in society. Accordingly, each perspective is necessary for a full illumination of the other.

The Background Perspective

The background perspective, which focuses on the complex social relations that ground every particular power relation, is considerably more complex than the foreground perspective. This perspective on power has similarities to Wartenberg's "situated conception of power." This conception, Wartenberg writes, "conceptualizes the role of 'peripheral social others.' By calling this account of power 'situated,' I stress the fact that the power dyad is itself situated in the context of other social relations through which it is actually constituted as a power relationship."[24] As Wartenberg points out, a specific power relation must be situated within a larger context in order to understand how it is "actually constituted as a power relationship." In other words, we need to view power from what I am calling the background perspective in order to understand how relations between distinct individuals come to be, so to speak, "power-ed."

The background perspective can be further differentiated into five distinct aspects: subject-positions, cultural meanings, social practices, institutions, and structures. I discuss each of these aspects in turn.

Subject-Positions. The aim of this analytic perspective is to highlight the constitutive role that power relations play in the formation of subject-positions that are available for individuals to occupy. In other words, when viewing power from this perspective, feminists might theorize the various subject-positions that are available to women. Further, this perspective allows feminists to understand the ways in which those subject-positions actually *position* women in a network of power relations.[25] Feminists need this analytic perspective to investigate the fact that women's

positions within this network tend to perpetuate the domination of women and discourage women's resistance and feminist solidarity. However, we also need to be attentive to the fact that women are never locked into one subject-position; rather, as Chantal Mouffe argues, individuals constantly move from one position to another, depending on their context. As a result, as Mouffe puts it, "the 'identity' of such a multiple and contradictory subject is . . . always contingent and precarious, temporarily fixed at the intersection of those subject positions and dependent on specific forms of identification."[26] Understanding the multiple and sometimes contradictory nature of subject-positions is crucial for feminist theorizing of the complex ways in which particular women can be positioned differently within the context of one and the same norm, practice, or institution.

Cultural Meanings. A feminist conception of power must also be able to examine power relations in terms of culturally encoded meanings and definitions. For example, a feminist analysis of power operating from this perspective must examine the way that key concepts such as femininity, masculinity, and sexuality are defined in a given cultural context. Similarly, it must pay attention to the ways in which the feminist movement contests culturally hegemonic definitions and proposes alternate, subversive definitions that can then become resources for individual women who are attempting to resist male domination. Finally, in the course of these examinations, such an analysis must be attentive to the way the meanings ascribed to "femininity," "masculinity," "sexuality," and the like vary widely with race, ethnicity, class, and sexual orientation.

For instance, according to certain culturally hegemonic definitions, to be "feminine" is to be passive, cooperative, and obedient, whereas to be "masculine" is to be aggressive, competitive, and in control. An examination of these definitions of masculinity and femininity has helped feminists to understand one of the factors that explains, for example, how particular husbands are able to assume positions of domination over their wives. However, some women who are dominated through marriage make use of the feminist critique of patriarchal definitions of "femininity" and "masculinity" as resources with which to resist such domination.[27] Moreover, as black feminists have pointed out, although the equation of "femininity" with passivity applies well to a discussion of middle-class white women, it does not apply well to a discussion of black women. Thus, in order to do justice to the complexity of power relations viewed from the perspective of cultural meanings, feminists must interrogate the different definitions of femininity, masculinity, sexuality, and the like that are applied to different women.

Social Practices. These multiple, culturally encoded understandings of femininity, masculinity, and sexuality are reflected in the third aspect of the background perspective—namely, the development of particular social practices. Thus, a feminist analysis that examines power from the background perspective needs to study the ways in which such understandings are intertwined with relevant practices. For example, a common (although far from universal) ideal practice in traditional gender-structured marriages between middle-class whites has been for wives to stay home and assume primary responsibility for housework and child care while husbands participate in the world of waged work. Indeed, this practice cannot be understood in isolation from the understandings of "true" (white, middle-class) femininity and masculinity that it upholds. Moreover, as feminists have pointed out, this practice reinforces male domination of women on a number of levels: For example, it renders individual wives more subject to domination from their husbands because lacking personal income and the skills that make them employable outside the home leaves wives with fewer "exit options," which in turn will make them more likely to put up with abuse.[28] However, individual wives and husbands can also draw on the resources provided by the feminist movement and attempt to build their marriages around practices that enable wives to resist male domination: For example, if both wife and husband work for wages and share the responsibility for work inside the home equally, then wives will be more likely to have exit options that put them in a better position successfully to resist domination when it occurs.[29]

It is important to note here that cultural meanings are often internalized and social practices often become habitual—phenomena to which a feminist analysis must pay careful attention, since they make feminist attempts to subvert and overthrow the subordination of women more difficult. By consciously or unconsciously internalizing hegemonic cultural meanings and by performing certain social practices by force of habit, a dominated individual can come to accept meanings and adopt practices that reflect and reinforce the power of those who dominate. For example, if a married woman has internalized the notion that to be feminine is to be passive, she may be less likely actively to assert her need for an equal share of the couple's resources, and the resulting lack of equity in the distribution of resources will reinforce the wife's subordinate position. The practice of habitually deferring to the husband's judgment with respect to financial matters will have a similar effect. If such practices become habitual and such definitions are internalized, the task of introducing new practices and meanings that offer women resources that help them resist subordination is rendered that much more difficult.

Institutions. Feminists should also be prepared to study power from the perspective of the institutional contexts in which subject-positions, cultural meanings, and social practices are embedded. Institutions may reinforce and uphold power relations by endorsing specific understandings of femininity or masculinity, or by encouraging or forbidding particular practices. For example, all corporations operate with particular understandings of masculinity and femininity that are influential in corporate hiring and promotion policies. In the crassest instances, these policies are explicitly different for those who are on the so-called mommy track than for those who are not. More broadly, few corporations have on-site childcare, as the work world is normally structured on the assumption that the worker will either be childless or have a wife. Such understandings of masculine and feminine roles also play a crucial role in judicial decisions in divorce cases regarding custody of children and division of marital assets. Moreover, these institutions often establish social practices that reinforce the domination of women. For example, the fact that corporations still pay women less than men for comparable work and channel women into the low-pay, low-status jobs that make up the pink-collar ghetto reinforces the larger practice in which some women stay at home while their husbands work for pay. On the other hand, institutions that have been created and sustained by the feminist movement can provide resources for women who seek to resist male domination. For example, the network of battered women's shelters offers institutional support as well as conceptual and normative resources for abused and battered wives to resist that exercise of domination.

Structures. Finally, viewing power from the background perspective involves understanding the structural aspects of power relations. There are two senses in which power can be analyzed from a structural perspective. The first sense understands structures as observed, *de facto* patterns of power distribution. In this sense, a structural analysis of power involves, for example, what Nancy Fraser and Linda Nicholson have characterized as the "identification and critique of macrostructures of inequality and injustice which cut across the boundaries separating relatively discrete practices and institutions."[30] According to Fraser and Nicholson, such an analysis allows "for critique of pervasive axes of stratification, for critique of broad-based relations of dominance and subordination along lines like gender, race, and class."[31] Viewing power from this analytic perspective enables us to make such general claims as "people of color are dominated by whites," "women are dominated by men," "women of color are dominated by white women," and so on. Further, it allows us to assert that these statements can have meaning across stretches of time and within many diverse cultures, even though the par-

ticular forms that domination takes in various times and cultures will usually be quite different. From this perspective, feminists must also examine the possibilities for individual and collective resistance that are both created and excluded by any given structure of power relations. As this kind of structural perspective on power is concerned with the emergence of observed patterns of power distribution, it analyzes power in terms of what I will call *surface structures.* However, we must exercise caution here. As Foucault warned, we must be careful not to find domination wherever we happen to go looking for it. Thus, when we analyze power from the perspective of surface structures we should be careful not to impose, in a top-down fashion, a rubric for understanding all social relations; instead, we should be attentive to the ways that this *de facto* structure of power relations emerges out of a consideration of particular power relations.

This perspective on the structural nature of power can be contrasted with one that views power in terms of what I will call *deep structures.* In this second sense, to analyze power from a structural perspective is to appeal to an explanatory framework that can illuminate or explicate the observed patterns of power relations that emerge as surface structures. Feminists have examined power relations within marriages, for example, in terms of deep power structures such as the gender division of labor. Women who work in the home are not paid, and women who work for wages tend to work in low-pay, low-skill, and low-status occupations. This pattern in turn *structures* the possibilities for the kinds of dyadic power relations individuals can have, the kinds of subject-positions available for them to occupy, the cultural meanings they are likely to employ, the social practices they are likely to adopt, and the institutions to which they can easily have access. Thus, one might say that viewing power from the perspective of deep structures involves examining the ways in which power relations actually structure our social situation, whereas from the surface perspective, power relations are viewed as a structure.[32]

* * *

In this final chapter, I have sought to accomplish two tasks: first, drawing on the insights gained by our analyses of Foucault, Butler, and Arendt in earlier chapters, to define power and some key power terms according to the kinds of interests that feminists bring to the study of power; and, second, to sketch out a methodology for analyzing power consisting of a series of perspectives from which power so defined might best be analyzed. Taken together, this definition of power and these methodological considerations provide a feminist conception of power that can illuminate the complex and multifarious relations of domination, resistance, and solidarity with which feminism is concerned.

Notes

1. I borrow this phrase from Robert Dahl (see Dahl, "Power as the Control of Behavior," in Steven Lukes, ed., *Power* [New York: New York University Press, 1986], p. 40). Dahl's list of power terms is much more extensive than the list I will develop here.

2. Steven Lukes, "Introduction," in Lukes, ed., *Power*, pp. 4–5. For a similar claim, see William Connolly, *The Terms of Political Discourse* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), p. 126.

3. The conception of power presented here may turn out to be useful for comprehending and contesting racism and heterosexism as well. I call this a "feminist" theory of power more for its theoretical focus than for its methodology. However, because investigating women's subordination necessarily involves investigating relations of dominance and subordination based on race, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and so on, the possible applicability of this approach to the study of power on other axes of stratification seems to me to be one of its greatest strengths.

4. For an extended account of this problem, see Elizabeth Spelman, *Inessential Woman: Problems of Exclusion in Feminist Thought* (Boston: Beacon, 1989).

5. Thomas Wartenberg, *The Forms of Power: From Domination to Transformation* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), p. 85.

6. Wartenberg explicitly argues that power must be defined with reference to intentional concepts (see ibid., pp. 62–65.)

7. Lukes, "Introduction," p. 1.

8. Wartenberg recognizes this aspect of male domination, but he does not seem to recognize that his definition of power-over as strategic is in tension with this recognition. (See Wartenberg, *Forms of Power*, pp. 155–157.)

9. For an account of decisions and nondecisions with respect to the study of power, see Peter Bachrach and Morton Baratz, "Two Faces of Power," in Roderick Bell et al., eds., *Political Power: A Reader in Theory and Research* (New York: Free Press, 1969), and "Decisions and Non-decisions: An Analytic Framework," *American Political Science Review* 57 (1963): 632–644.

10. On the importance of anticipated reactions in the study of power, see Jack Nagel, *The Descriptive Analysis of Power* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975).

11. On the importance of accounting for more than merely avowed interests in the definition of power, see Steven Lukes, *Power: A Radical View* (London: Macmillan, 1974).

12. For a critique of dyadic and interventional models of power-over, see Wartenberg, *Forms of Power*, pp. 65–69; and Nancy Fraser, "Beyond the Master/Subject Model: Reflections on Carole Pateman's *Sexual Contract*," *Social Text* 37 (1993): 173–181.

13. Coaching would thus be an instance of what Wartenberg calls "transformative power." (See Wartenberg, *Forms of Power*, especially chs. 9 and 10.) The instances of transformative power that he discusses are teaching, parenting, and therapy.

14. On this point, see Wartenberg: "A relation between two agents is an instance of domination only if the dominated agent is specifically harmed through the relationship" (Wartenberg, *Forms of Power*, p. 118).

15. Here I part company with Wartenberg, who argues that theorists of power should focus their attention on power-over. (See Wartenberg, *Forms of Power*, passim.)

16. See, for example, Virginia Held, *Feminist Morality: Transforming Culture, Society, and Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), pp. 136–137.

17. Here I am following William Connolly's characterization of power-to. (See Connolly, *Terms of Political Discourse*, pp. 86–87.)

18. This raises the issue of the conceptual interdependence of *power-over* and *power-to*. I shall address that issue in a moment.

19. I say *merely* here because achieving a kind of power-over those who are in a position of dominance and would like to remain there may be a particular feminist goal. In other words, in some cases, feminists may have to use power over others to achieve the kind of changes that we strive to achieve. On this point, see Jane Mansbridge, "Using Power/Fighting Power," *Constellations* 1 (1994): 53–73.

20. Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Co., 1969), p. 44.

21. For a discussion of these aspects of power-with, see Mary Parker Follett, "Power," in Henry C. Metcalf and L. Urwick, eds., *Dynamic Administration: The Collected Papers of Mary Parker Follett* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1942), pp. 95–116.

22. However, there is a tradition in political theory that defines power more broadly than this. The most notable historical example is Hobbes's definition of power as the "present means to obtain some future apparent good." I am grateful to my colleague Bernard Gert for reminding me of Hobbes's interesting discussion of power. (See Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Edwin Curley [Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1994], p. 50.) Twentieth-century exceptions to this trend include C. B. Macpherson, who argues that political theorists need to investigate both power-over and power-to, and Jane Mansbridge, whose definition of power as "the actual or potential causal relation between the interests of an actor or set of actors and the outcome itself" includes both power-over and power-to. (See Macpherson, *Democratic Theory: Essays in Retrieval* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973]; and Mansbridge, "Using Power/Fighting Power," pp. 55–56.)

23. Held, *Feminist Morality*, p. 209; emphasis added.

24. Wartenberg, *Forms of Power*, p. 142. The major difference between my account and Wartenberg's is that his is solely concerned with power-over, whereas mine attempts to cover power-to and power-with as well. On this point, see Wartenberg, *Forms of Power*, pp. 27ff.

25. On this point, see the discussion of "positionality" in Linda Alcoff, "Cultural Feminism Versus Post-Structuralism: The Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory," *Signs* 13 (1988): 428ff.

26. Chantal Mouffe, "Democratic Politics and the Question of Identity," in John Rajchman, ed., *The Identity in Question* (New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 33.

27. For a discussion of how women who are not feminist activists or scholars use such resources in their daily lives, see Jane Mansbridge, "The Role of Dis-

course in the Feminist Movement," paper delivered at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, September 2–5, 1993.

28. For a discussion of the effects of traditional marriage on women's power, see Susan Moller Okin, *Justice, Gender, and the Family* (New York: Basic Books, 1989), ch. 7.

29. Of course, shared wage and house work will address only one of the many ways in which women's subordination is perpetuated through marriage. Even if both partners work for wages, the wife's wages will probably be significantly lower than the husband's, thus affecting the power relations in the relationship.

30. Nancy Fraser and Linda J. Nicholson, "Social Criticism Without Philosophy: An Encounter Between Feminism and Postmodernism," in Linda J. Nicholson, ed., *Feminism/ Postmodernism* (New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 23.

31. Ibid.

32. For a discussion of power as both structuring and structured, see Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1977).