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POWER RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THE MONOPOLISTIC
COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION AND INDIVIDUALS IN ITS
ENVIRONMENT

by

Jessie D. Greenstreet Harper

A DISSERTATION

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In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Sociology

Under the Supervision of Professor Jack Siegman

Lincoln, Nebraska

July, 1976

TITLE

**POWER RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THE MONOPOLISTIC COMMUNITY
ORGANIZATION AND INDIVIDUALS IN ITS ENVIRONMENT**

BY

Jessie D. Greenstreet Harper

APPROVED

DATE

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To Jim, Bruce, and Jill,
all have made particular personal contributions
without which I could not have completed this research.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Background

Power as a phenomenon in society has always interested social theorists. Power was viewed, initially, as a political phenomenon; thus its study was considered particularly appropriate to the domain of political philosophers and later to political scientists. Increasingly, however, power has been recognized as lodged not only within the political institutions but in all major institutions of society. Indeed, the ubiquity of power in society has led Amos Hawley to state, "Every social act is an exercise of power, every social relationship is a power equation, and every social group or system is an organization of power" (1963: 422). Although some theorists would urge a narrower definition of the scope of power than that proposed by Hawley, his comment emphasizes the pervasiveness of power relationships throughout human society.

This study is addressed to one kind of social power, namely, that of organizations which hold a monopoly over necessary public services in a community. In particular it is concerned with the power relationships between such organizations and the individual consumers who must use the services of the organizations. Hypotheses are presented proposing that monopolistic organizations (1) overestimate the extent

of their acceptance by individuals in the community, (2) are influenced more by other organizations than by individuals, and (3) experience more conflict with community individuals when organization output has high normative content.

This chapter presents definitions of social power used by a number of social scientists, and a summary of literature concerning the role of organizations in community power structures. In Chapter II pertinent concepts are defined, hypotheses are expanded, and both are related to systems theory. In Chapter III the research site is described, as well as the data-collection process. Findings are presented in Chapter IV; with a summary and conclusions reserved for Chapters V and VI.

B. The Concept of Power

Attempts to Define Power

The search for a brief, yet comprehensive definition of the concept social power becomes formidable as one tries to discard those variables that impinge upon or relate to power, while retaining a generic definition for this ambiguous social process. Two students of power attest to this dilemma. Robert Bierstedt has said, "In the entire lexicon of sociological concepts none is more troublesome than the concept of power" (1950: 730). Likewise, Marvin Olsen states, "Power exertion is perhaps the least studied and least understood--and yet most fundamental--process in social life" (1970: 2).

Max Weber said, "In general, we understand by 'power' the chance

of a man or of a number of men to realize their own will in a communal action even against the resistance of others who are participating in the action" (1946: 180). Weber's phrase "communal action" gives particularly social connotations to his definition, as opposed to purely personal power.

Etzioni's definition of power is also conceptually Weberian, although his terminology differs somewhat. "Power," Etzioni states, "is a capacity to overcome part or all of the resistance, to introduce changes in the face of opposition (this includes sustaining a course of action or preserving a status quo that would otherwise have been discontinued or altered)" (1968: 314, emphasis his). According to Etzioni, power is always relational, i.e. one cannot speak of an actor's power without having a recipient in mind. Only in such a relationship does the concept have meaning.

Bierstedt carefully distinguishes power from such other concepts as prestige, influence, authority, and force. He concludes that power is the capacity, or ability, to apply sanctions (1950).

On the other hand, John Walton employs the concept to include both potential and actualized power; Bierstedt having defined power as only potential. Furthermore, Walton asserts that the threat of sanctions distinguishes power from influence -- influence referring only to the capacity to mobilize resources, without the actual threat to utilize that capacity. Thus, according to Walton, power is 'the capacity to mobilize resources for the accomplishment of intended effects with recourse

to some type of sanction(s) to encourage compliance" (1968: 449, emphasis his).

Herbert Simon sees power as an "influence process." Power can be defined as 'the exercise of influence. . . in affecting policies of others than the self,' states Simon (1953: 504). His discussion has particular significance for this study, in that it stresses the particular problems encountered in conceptualizing power in a multi-unit, symmetrical, or feed-back situation. Simon emphasizes the importance of distinguishing between the influence of an element considered independently, 'with all the reverse feedback relations ignored, (and). . . the net influence of the element, taking into account all the reciprocal influences of other elements upon it' (1953: 506). Power is easily identified, therefore, in a bilateral context, but in a relational or system context, the net effect of a power source is more difficult to isolate and measure.

Robert Dahl, like Simon, also makes no distinction between the concepts of power and influence. Although Dahl notes the need for more precise operational meanings and measurements for the two concepts, he uses the terms interchangeably in his own work (1961).

Hawley and Wirt and Paul Mott have studied the literature on power, seeking a summary definition of the concept. Hawley and Wirt conclude that 'at minimum, power analysts agree that power is involved when one person or a group achieves compliance from others in respect to the disposition of a given value' (1968: 1). Mott, after examining various approaches in the literature, proposes a definition of his own:

'Social power is defined as usable and socially valued latent energy locked in human organization" (1970: 8). Through this definition, Mott does more to cloud than clarify the issue--e.g., how is power released if it is 'locked in'? Nevertheless, the argument that power is a uniquely social phenomenon is strengthened with his statement that there is no power without organization and that, indeed, power cannot be conceptualized apart from its source, human organization.

We turn, at this point, to Robert Schulze, who relates power to statuses and roles, thereby casting power as a distinctly sociological, rather than political, economic, or psychological, phenomenon. Schulze states,

It seems. . . sociologically sound to accept a Weberian definition which stresses the potential to act. Power may thus be conceived as an inherently group-linked property, an attribute of social statuses rather than of individual persons. Whether or not the specific individuals in these statuses cash in on their control potential in their concrete role behavior is obviously an important matter, but it is not important to the conceptual clarification of the key term, power. . . accordingly power will denote the capacity or potential of persons in certain statuses to set conditions, make decisions, and/or take actions which are determinative for the existence of others within a given social system (1961: 30).

Schulze's statement serves as a bridge between the discussion of social power as an isolated generic concept, and social power as a dynamic sociological process. In referring to the power residing within the institutions of society, he reminds us that, although power may be latent, and the institution for the time-being beneficent and benign, nevertheless, the potential for power remains. The point is that persons

and groups who receive the output of an institution recognize that the institution has the ability to exercise power. Consequently, such persons and groups are likely to modify their behavior accordingly, by showing deference or submission. Such behavior may, in effect, actually increase the potential power of the institution, for, with the recipients convinced that power is indeed present, the institution does not have to utilize its resources and therefore can preserve its energies for future encounters.

Power in the Community

Sociological interest in the dynamics of power processes is nearly as old as the discipline itself. Analyses of such processes date back at least to Marx' early assertions that the mode of production of material goods determines the social, political, and intellectual, as well as the economic, life processes. Indeed, Marx argued that the arrangement of material production in capitalist society and the exploitation of the workers would result in conflict as the working class attempted to throw off the absolute power assumed by the owners of industry. For Marx, therefore, conflict was inevitable in this dialectical process as each class challenged the power of the other.

In addition to Marx, Pareto (1935), Michels (1962), and Mosca (1939), among others, have analyzed the domination of society's lower classes by the privileged and elite classes. Each of these scholars attempted to analyze power processes of entire societies. From the

vantagepoint of today's sociology, the work of these early analysts now appears to be ideological and polemical; moreover, they lacked firm empirical support for their views.

The origin of 20th-century empirical studies of community power is usually traced to Robert and Helen Lynds' two books on community relationships in Muncie, Indiana. The first, Middletown, was published in 1929, and the sequel, Middletown in Transition, appeared nearly a decade later. For the most part, the Lynds used participant observation and data from interviews to gather information on the city's social organization. Community media also provided a source of information. They found that persons residing in Middletown fell into two classes, a relatively small upper stratum known in the community as 'business-people,' and a much larger number of people the community called the 'working class.' Particularly important was their discovery that a single family dominated the city's social, political, and economic institutions. That family owned the largest local industry, and their continuing power was due both to the penetration of their money into all the important community institutions, and to the social deference accorded their influential position.

Shortly after the Lynds' second book, W. Lloyd Warner's Yankee City series was introduced (1941). This series supported the Lynds' view that a community has a fairly rigid hierarchical social system dominated by a recognized elite who "run the town."

These early studies of community power structures have been

severely criticized in later years on methodological grounds. Nevertheless, they are recognized as ground-breaking empirical community power studies. They utilized a predominantly elitist model of society which community power researchers continued to follow during the decade of the 1950's.

Floyd Hunter provided the groundwork for a further spate of community power studies appearing after 1950 with his book analyzing the power structure of Atlanta--called *Regional City* (1953). Hunter's work appeared to have been influenced by Warner's stratification findings in *Yankee City*. He, like Warner, found a single hierarchy of community power, controlled by a relatively small number of men. Many of them filled several community roles, thereby forming an elite stratum of decision-makers. In 1958, Vidich and Bensman published a study describing power relations in a small upstate New York community (1958). Their findings were similar to Hunter's, in that a few persons appeared to control most of the important community decisions.

Hunter had introduced a research design in which a panel of residents were asked to name the persons they perceived as most influential in the community. He argued that this technique yielded more sophisticated information than was secured by equating a person's influence with his political position. However, Hunter's technique too often resulted in equating reputation for power with actual decision-making power. Therefore, his study, along with others which revealed a predominantly elitist power structure, was criticized severely. Political

scientists, including Kaufman and Jones (1954), Dahl (1958), Polsby (1959), Wolfinger (1960), and Wildavsky (1962) were particularly critical. They argued that a research design intended to locate an elitist decision-making structure would undoubtedly discover such a structure. These same critics contended that, on the basis of their research, a pluralist model, consisting of many competing decision-makers in one community, better reflected actual decision-making than would an elitist model.

Several comparative studies, including those by Freeman, et al. (1963), Blankenship (1964), and Presthus (1964), have focused on the effect that the research design has on the findings of community power studies. The Freeman study indicated that numerous types of decision-makers do, in fact, exist in a given community and that the nature of the research design influences which of these groups of decision-makers is identified. Freeman located three principal categories of leaders, namely Institutional Leaders, Effectors, and Activists. Institutional Leaders were the prestigious persons identified through a reputational research design. Such persons often were not active participants in decision-making. Effectors, on the other hand, were political and government personnel who were active decision-makers and could be identified readily by a design equating decision-making with power. The third group were the Activists, or those middle-class persons who participated most visibly in community organizations. While this last group of persons 'lack(ed) the power base provided by association with

government or one of the major industrial or business firms. . .by sheer commitment of time and effort to community affairs. . .(they were able to help shape the future of the community"(1963: 797). Both Blankenship and Presthus found ~~that~~ communities apparently had differing types of predominant leaders, depending on such factors as community size, economic activity in the community, demographic structure, etc. While recognizing the influence of the research design, these writers argued that each community has a distinctive pattern of decision-making.

Bachrach and Baratz (1962) made an important contribution to the pluralist-elitist controversy in pointing out that an empirical decision-making model does not take into account 'hondecision-making' in a community. They observed that community power researchers who have used a decision-making model generally have reviewed the public record after specific decisions have been made in a community. Such 'after the fact' research frequently overlooks an important source of power, namely, the ability to prevent issues from being discussed in a given community. Bachrach and Baratz argued that the researcher must not overlook the chance 'that some person or association could limit decision-making to relatively noncontroversial matters, by influencing community values and political procedures and rituals'(1962: 949).

Simpson (1971) likewise has emphasized the importance in seeking out those community forces which not only influence decisions, but which also prevent some issues from ever being publicly discussed. Simpson,

like Bachrach and Baratz, asserts that power has been employed when controversial and sensitive issues and institutions are not submitted for public decision-making.

C. Organizations in the Community Power Structure

From the discussion above, it is clear that power sources in any community are neither obvious nor easily located. Although social scientists occasionally have disagreed on the source of greatest power within a community, nevertheless they generally have agreed that many social agents do indeed hold power. Apart from powerful community individuals who exercise influence or control, it is also clear that organizations such as manufacturing firms, newspapers, churches, and schools, all with unique sanctions at their disposal, influence community decision-making.

This last point dates back to the Lynds' Middletown, where they found that those in control of the principal economic resources exerted other kinds of power. At the time the Lynds studied Muncie, Indiana, local residents usually controlled civic as well as economic institutions; thus community individual power and community economic power were congruent. Frequently these same residents held important local political positions also. However, with the changes in industrial society, the possibility is less likely that single individuals will occupy, simultaneously, positions of social, economic, and political influence. Increasingly, local ownership of firms has been replaced by extra-

community ownership or control. This change has made the previous model of local economic power less valid. We find that, with the separation between ownership and control, the increasing importance of absentee-ownership of the most vital industries in many communities, and the decreasing likelihood that elected officials will exercise control in economic and social sectors, the earlier models of power in community settings must be revised. A number of important studies have dealt with such problems, particularly those which have investigated the role of economic dominants who, in effect, are 'outside' agents.

With respect to such community changes, Pellegrin and Coates (1970) described the role of local executives who represented the dominant absentee-owned small-town corporations in Baton Rouge in the early 1950's. They noted that, although many corporations were no longer headquartered in the community, those corporations nevertheless continued communication with each other and maintained significant influence over local decision-making through executives lodged in the city. The researchers emphasized the control exercised by such corporations on their executives, even while encouraging them to take part in small-town decision-making. Of particular importance, according to Pellegrin and Coates, was the company's charge to the local executive to maintain 'zealous guard over the corporation's interest and prerogatives. Not only does the corporation dictate the terms, but it decides what social values are to be implemented by its choice of projects and the policies followed by its agents" (: 165). Such selective participation on the part

of local executives was effective, and community projects were usually doomed to failure without the informal support of absentee-owned industrial corporations.

In a somewhat different vein, Robert Schulze noted a tendency toward complete separation of political and economic decision-making in Ypsilanti, Michigan, as economic leaders tended to remove themselves from the local political scene (1961). Schulze initially discovered a "bifurcation of power," as two sets of leaders, economic and political, emerged in small industrial cities. He later observed a "trifurcation of power," because leaders of locally-owned industry assumed a different role from that assumed by leaders of absentee-owned industry. This resulted in three leadership groups, namely executives of absentee-owned companies, executives of locally-owned companies, and local political leaders. Schulze concluded that leaders of absentee-owned companies, while not physically present during local decision-making, nevertheless wielded a subtle power that effectively impaired the decision-making potential of local political decision-makers.

Clelland and Form (1970) substantially replicated Schulze's study in Lansing, Michigan, a city somewhat larger and less dependent on the metropolitan center of Detroit than was Ypsilanti. Their findings indicated that "unlike the economic dominants in the satellite city, those in the independent city have not abandoned their decision-making role in community issues" (: 87). In yet another replication, Robert Mills French (1970), like Schulze, found support for the "bifurcation"