# Conclusion
# Redefining Power

## Terry Kupers

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**Terry A. Kupers**

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Men tend to define power very narrowly as the power to impose one's will over others. In order to enhance his power a man must very early in life begin achieving respect, a reputation, a position of authority, good connections, status, wealth, and the like. And this is connected to our notion of manliness. As long as men believe that they must be concerned above all else with their place in a hierarchy, and that the only choices they have are an ambitious climb to the top or a fall to the bottom of the heap, we will continue to maintain a steady pace, fear dependency, feel isolated from others, compensate for our inadequacies by oppressing women and gays, and continue to be uncertain about our adequacy no matter what heights we attain.

Kenneth Boulding (1990) distinguishes three dimensions of power. *Threat power* is the kind that permits one to get one's way in the face of challenges from others. This is that narrow sense of power, the ability to force opponents to give in for fear of unpleasant consequences. Then there is *exchange power,* the ability to produce and exchange objects of value. And the third is *integrative power,* the ability to achieve what one desires through love, nurturing, loyalty,

and other positive forms of connection with people. It is only because men feel that they lack integrative power that they rely so one-sidedly on threat power, for instance beating their wives when they feel unable to attain by any other means the degree of unconditional love and respect they crave.

Steve Smith (1991) applies Boulding's three dimensions of power to the study of masculinity, pointing out that in our society the uses of power are organized along gender lines, men relying more on *threat power* while women rely more on *integrative power.* According to Smith:

> If power is exclusively threat power, men are indeed the more powerful sex. But if power includes the ability to bring about any perceived good—including meeting one's own basic needs—then integrative power becomes central to the analysis of power differentials between the sexes. Itself responsible for many of the greatest of human goods, integrative power is frequently exercised more effectively by women. Many men are sadly deficient in integrative power precisely because they have assumed a greater role in the exercise of threat power. They thus become dependent upon women to meet basic human needs, while (in the service of threat power) denying their very dependency. Once we have overthrown the illusion of threat power as all-encompassing, the costs to men are

glaringly evident, (p. 25)

There are two aspects of power that warrant redefinition. One involves goals and values, the other involves the actual wielding of power. In terms of goals and values, men traditionally define power in relation to their sense of themselves as "real men." What makes one feel more like a "real man" is what one calls power. Even men who involve themselves fully in the rearing of children or the caring for people who are dying of AIDS sometimes feel they are less a man for it. It is as if a part of these men still buys into the American dream and thinks the most powerful men are the ones who earn huge salaries and sit among the power elite. Then they compare and decide they are relatively less powerful, less successful, and therefore less of a man. If things are to change for the better, we must redefine power so that we can feel powerful while doing tasks that are not traditional for men. Of course, this means men must assign more value to *integrative power* and less to *threat power* and *exchange power.*

An incident from a men's therapy group I conduct illustrates the point. Two group members who regularly spar with each other at meetings begin a dialogue about what it is about the other that rubs

each the wrong way. What part of each man is set off by the antics of the other, and what earlier relationship(s) with a man make this combative relationship seem so familiar to each? Both explore earlier relationships with fathers, brothers, and teachers that come to mind. Both say they feel intimidated by the other and find it difficult to open up and be vulnerable in the other's presence. The group confronts the two, demanding to know why they have to be so combative all the time. The group wants this duo to resolve their differences so there can be more trust and openness at meetings.

A few weeks later one of the two men confesses to the group he is feeling very depressed, wonders whether it is worth going on, and has no clue as to the cause of his depression. This degree of vulnerability is quite uncharacteristic for him. The man with whom he usually spars is silent during that session, but at the next weekly meeting says he was quite moved by the other's confession that he did not know the cause of his depression. The group discusses the tendency among men to act intimidating just when they feel vulnerable. At this point a third member asks the man who was depressed whether he really achieves what he wants by being combative. He responds: "Not really. It feels better to be close to you guys, even while I'm feeling miserable, and to

be in this conversation right now." In other words; if the goal is to be able to lord it over other men as one does in a business rivalry or legal battle, intimidation and male posturing work; but if the goal is to end one's sense of isolation and feel connected to others, vulnerability and trust make one more effective and powerful.

As a society, should the first priority be the maximization of short-term profit or should it be the creation of a just society in which everyone has a job and a roof over their heads? Should we continue to sink a huge proportion of our tax dollar into the race for global military dominance, or should we shift resources into alternative uses of advanced technology, for instance, figuring out ways to feed everyone and still preserve a livable environment? Would we be less powerful as a nation if we were to put more of our resources into figuring out ways to make the largest number of people in our society happy, but in the process we accumulated less financial and military *threat power* in the international arena? In fact, because the world has changed it is no longer reasonable to expect the United States to dominate the globe economically as it did in the post-World War II era —unless, that is, we attempt to continue our domination by military means, a disastrous course. But if we are to convert our social

priorities and embark on a peaceful path of international collaboration, we will have to reconstruct our notion of masculinity, of what it means to be a "real man." We will have to redefine power in a way that permits men to feel powerful while they rear children, care for the ill, develop better quality intimacies, and so forth.

I mentioned that there are two aspects of power that warrant redefining. The second involves the wielding of power. If the men who value their integrative *power* end up giving away their power in the public arena, then control of this society will remain in the hands of the one-dimensional wielders of *threat power* who have succeeded in practically destroying the environment and bringing us to the brink of world war. If men who would change all this redefine power and reorder their priorities, will not that make them, as a group, less powerful in society? Because this has never happened in a modem society, we cannot know the answer. But we can attempt, collectively, to make that answer a resounding no. Men who utilize their *integrative power* as much as their *threat power* can be just as powerful, or more powerful, as those who currently wield power. This must be the case if things are to change for the better.

I believe that men who utilize their *integrative power* can be more powerful as a social force than they would be if they, like traditional men, relied almost exclusively on their *threat power.* Again, the lesson comes from the women's movement. Women were able to improve their situation, their solidarity with other women, and the quality of their lives by refusing to join men in a battle involving *threat power* alone. They insisted the personal was political, and taught us it could be. And in the process they demonstrated how powerful their *integrative power* could make them. For instance, women's friendships and capacity to meet in groups and talk about deeply personal issues make them very effective as organizers for social change. If there is any doubt, consider the way the women's movement has thrown the spotlight on sexual harassment at work, and the greater leverage women now have to put a halt to it. Men must learn that connectedness with others can boost one's power, and that by working together we can be even more powerful, especially if we figure out ways to collaborate without constructing new hierarchies and rivalries.

A large number of men are discovering a new kind of power, the kind that is expressed in having a wonderful circle of intimates and

feeling secure because of it, the power that derives from knowing one is living according to one's principles even if that means one does not accumulate all one might, the kind that comes from sharing the burden with others one can respect as equals. In a community of equals a new kind of power can be realized, not the kind where a man stands alone and conquers real and imagined enemies; rather, a man would be able to discuss problems with a network of sympathetic people who might help him devise a collaborative strategy for solving a large array of problems and coping with a variety of threats. When I see men at gatherings celebrating their newfound sense of brotherhood and the relief they feel that they are not as totally alone in the universe as they once felt they were, I know I am part of something that is very powerful and I feel powerful being a part.

Once men begin to expand upon what Boulding terms their *integrative power,* a whole set of connections become obvious. Men who are attuned to the plight of others are not able to ignore sexual harassment at work, homelessness, racism, drastic cutbacks in social welfare programs, inattention to the plight of AIDS sufferers, ecological disasters such as the destruction of the rain forests and the ozone layer, and the threat of war and nuclear annihilation.

Men who get in touch with their feminine side, and begin to value their role as father, friend, and team player, need not give away their power in the public arena. In fact, by working collaboratively with others who share a vision of better gender relations, men will discover a whole new level of power. And, by their example, they will begin to redefine masculinity as well as power.

Vying for power in the public arena involves a large organizational effort. Massive public involvement is needed to win abortion rights, effective affirmative action, decent jobs for men and women, affordable childcare, and so on. I am not ready to propose a specific political program, that will require discussion among a large number of people. But I am saying we need to become more active in social struggles if we are to change anything. Many men's groups as well as individual men have joined women's struggles to "take back the night"; end domestic violence, date rape, and child abuse; and many straights have joined gays in the struggle against AIDS. Men's groups and organizations could also join their blue collar brothers and sisters on picket lines protesting plant closures and joblessness. And men could join their brothers among the minorities in protesting the dismantling of inner city schools, the unavailability of affordable

housing and rewarding work opportunities, and the inattention to people of color who are dying of AIDS as well as other diseases.

Changing gender relations is not merely a matter of social struggles. Personal relationships must change as well. As a large number of people engage in collaborative childrearing, our definitions of manliness and power change. Men who work with men who batter are redefining power in the domestic realm, teaching men who feel inadequate that they can feel more powerful on account of caring relationships with women and children *(integrative power)* than they ever would on account of their ability to beat and abuse them (*threat power,* see Sonkin & Durphy, 1982; Kivel, 1992). Black men who go to inner city schools to talk with youths about sex, drugs, and alternatives to enlistment in the military are redefining power for these youngsters, teaching them that a quick buck and the ability to lord it over others is not the only way to feel powerful. There are many other examples of the new kinds of heroes we already have among us.

I began this book with a discussion of men who abhor domination from an early age and support women's struggles for equality, even while they are unable to stand up to the women in their lives and do

not accomplish all they might at work for fear of becoming brutes.

These men must find ways to stand up for their own rights—in personal relationships, at work, and in the public arena—or else men who have no qualms about the suffering of others will continue to wield most of the power in this society. To the extent men lack a vision of a better society in which one does not have to be a brute to have a voice in the halls of power—a vision that provides a third alternative to the either/or dichotomy of winners and losers in the (*threat*) power game—they settle for lives that are less than fully vital. The challenge that confronts men is to find ways to be powerful without oppressing anyone, and in the process to redefine power, heroism, and masculinity. This is an immense challenge. And men will never meet it in isolation. We need new kinds of bonds among men and between men and women, straight and gay, if we are to construct, collectively, new forms of masculinity and new and better gender relations.

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