

POWER

. . . But this is the saying of a dream
in waking
I wish there were somewhere

actual we could stand
handing the power-glasses back and forth
looking at the earth, the wildwood
where the split began"

Adrienne Rich, Waking In The Dark (1971)

Women's stories of law school talk of power. We associate law with authority and power, and lawyers as agents of this power. Power, then, is one facet of a life in law. Lawyers deal with those in power, represent individuals to those who have power because of their authority, help resolve disputes between the weak and the powerful, and between those who have power. Lawyers who deal with and understand power are themselves thought to have power.

When we talk about power, as we have done here, it is power from a masculine perspective. Masculine and feminine conceptions of power tend to be different. Traditional masculine views of power link it to hierarchy and social roles. Women differentiate between the power identified with men and the power of women.

Women's View of Power

Masculine Power

Control
Domination
Influence
Status
Authority
Aggression

Feminine Power

Support
Maturity
Independence/Responsibility
Insight
Self-Reliance/Self-Esteem
Strength/Drive/Energy
Confidence
Skill
Knowledge

There are a number of reasons one might want to look at power in the context of law school itself. Law school is a place where students study power and fantasize about it. Law schools attract people who are fascinated by power, who, psychologists would say, have a "need" for power. Law school is a microcosm of the legal profession. A study of power in the law school context is a way to learn about power in the broader context of the legal profession. Issues about power in the legal profession are of concern to women who want a sense of power and want to know how to protect themselves from those who have it.

To Think About Power: An Assignment

One way to study something like power is to begin with your own experience. Start with the "here and now." What kind of power is present at the very moment that you try to start thinking about it? If you are alone, is there some experience of power even though no one is in the room with you? Do others have power over you even though absent? Most of us would agree that others do have power over us and influence us in profound ways even though no one is in the room with you. Parents are one example, and we can think of others. The grand hope of teachers is that their teaching will stay with you even when you leave a course. So teachers are trying to exercise power, even though it is not viewed in these terms. Another possibility is that certain ideas have power in their influence over our thinking. So it is possible to think about power even in the context of sitting quietly alone in a room.

Now venture out into the world. Put yourself in a law school class and repeat the exercise. Think about power in this new context. Does it feel different? How does the presence of other people affect our experience of power? Do we tend to identify power with particular people in the group? Which ones?

Why? Is the person that we identify with power in a particular role? Do they possess a particular skill? How is power manifested in the behavior of the person identified? Do they seem to have a sense of their power or are they oblivious to it? Does it matter?

When we identify power with a particular person in a social context we need to shift our focus and reflect on our own power. How is it manifested in the presence of this person? What kind of relationship do we have with those we identify as powerful? What is the relationship of their power and our own power?

Finally, we explored how law school had affected our images of lawyering and our understanding of power. Using the stories we tell, and an awareness about the self that we brought to law school, what kind of person have we become? How are the changes related to a sense of becoming more powerful? Or has legal education worked to convince us that whatever weaknesses we brought with us are even more problematic?

PATTY MYERS

Energy. Influence. Authority. Motion. Force.
Independence.

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Thinking about power makes me shiver. Power is a vast, mesmerizing force which seems to rule me. Everything I'm aiming for is deeply embedded in my struggle for power.

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I can actually, physically, see and feel power. (Now, it's about five feet away, hovering about three feet off the ground. Although it isn't stationary, the radius from me always seems to be the same.) It's a spherical, yellow mass with emanations coming from its center, beckoning me. It has an incredible intensity, and it seems to be electricly charged, like a force field. It entices and frightens me at

the same time, frightening me by its overpowering strength.

Words of a song from several years back haunt me-- they go something like, "Mother always told me not to look into the eye of the sun...but Mama, that's where the fun is." (Manfred Mann's Earth Band, "Blinded by the Light.") The physical "power" which I see and feel is like Eve's forbidden apple, sensuous temptation and wicked fear of the unknown.

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I have a limited amount of power, but I want more. I want the ability to join this force. I want to make great things happen--to influence and motivate.

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I am not powerless. "Women" are not powerless. Some "people" are powerless.

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Sometimes I feel egocentric for going after power with such drive. The majority of my motives seem to be self-serving. I want to be powerful for my own benefit. Although I have good intentions for society in general, I'm too preoccupied by "self" and it worries me.

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It's hard to define power. So little information has been disseminated. I picked up three books which I thought would be good sources of other opinions on power: Woman's Almanac; Games Mother Never Taught You, by Betty Lehan Harragan; and The New Executive Woman, by Marcille Gray Williams. All three are books which provide strategies for women who want to get ahead in life. None of them could provide an exact meaning of "power," although that was the subject of each.

The last few weeks have brought about a new surge of power. Before I came to law school I was a powerful person, but, power left me during my first year here. Recently, I've had twinges of excitement--the first-year

blues seem to have departed, and once again I'm experiencing some zest and energy.

Before I came to law school I felt I had a great deal of personal power--I could do anything I wanted to do, without restrictions. (I probably couldn't be the president of the United States because I didn't have the necessary financial backing, but I didn't want to be the president.)

I was a strong, intelligent, capable woman. I came to law school with that frame of mind. Suddenly, power was consumed by law professors. Whatever power students had was rapidly depleted.

At law school I was one of a class of 140, strong, intelligent, capable people. Everyone had a sense of power. Suddenly, I was no longer special, no longer powerful.

Life went downhill from then on, and my first year of law school was a depressing mess.

The recent feelings of strength started developing over the summer when I worked at a law office which dealt with indigent clients. Those clients were truly helpless when it came to dealing with any type of legal matters, and the attorney who could help them was an all-powerful demigod. Although I was a lowly law student, and a somewhat incompetent one at that, I picked up the vibrations of power transmitted from the clients to the attorneys.

I had occasion to meet a lot of people. I was always pleasantly surprised at the reactions I got when I said I was a law student. People were impressed! In the small world of law school, I seemed to have forgotten that attorneys are generally respected, powerful citizens in the "real world."

Professors have started talking to me like I'm a person, and they're actually starting to tell me what I want to know about the law, not just what I should know.

I'm regaining a sense of personal worth now, and along with it comes a sense of power. My overriding problem with law school up to this point has been a lack of recognition of power by my professors, my classmates, and myself. I had forgotten that attorneys are people with power.

When I think of power, I think negatively of men. I imagine the chairman of the board of a large corporation ordering his subordinates around without regard to their feelings. It seems as if being a powerful person means to disassociate yourself from feeling.

I do not see myself as a powerful person, which presents a dilemma. I don't want to be powerful, because I feel it would be at the expense of other people. I do want to be powerful, because then I won't be in the position of having someone else control my life.

I would like to define the word "powerful" in a way which would allow me to have power without using it at another's expense. This type of power would be experienced from within, in contrast to socially-created corporate power. This definition of power would resemble high self-esteem, not used to the detriment of another, but to help make a better world.

Women are brought up to take account of the effects they have on others. If they make others angry or unhappy, it is their responsibility to make things right again. They are not trained to do what has to be done for a positive end result but which may cause momentary unpleasantness. I would like to see women so secure in themselves that they know that what they are doing is right. Then their power would be creative. Women would experience their power from within, which would free up energy to use for creative and productive ends. Power would be used to further one's potential rather than to make up for one's inadequacies. This type of power would be positive.

I can imagine myself in the role of an attorney with the power to sway a jury or close an important business transaction. This type of power seems positive and real--as long as I imagine it. However, when I try to make this fantasy into a reality, obstacles appear.

Today I went to a job interview and was confronted by a very "powerful" trial attorney. He exuded power. When he spoke of litigation, he had fire in his eyes. I could tell he loved confrontation and a fresh kill. I could not relate to this maniac. He was out of touch with the human qualities of compassion, self-doubt, and fear.

I am beginning to feel that if I can't deal with the

"power aura" of the typical attorney I won't have the power to function in the public sphere. I won't work for an attorney who is numb to the pangs of self-doubt. I want to stay in touch with my feelings. It's hard to see how the dream of "lawyering" can be realized with the power structure as it exists today.

Before I went to law school I had assumed that a law degree would ensure me of exercising "lawyer powers." Now I know that it will take either an emotional sacrifice or a very unique law firm to make my lawyer dreams a reality.

DENISE CHAMBERLAIN

Power--what a wonderful word. The word brings to mind strength, drive, control, energy, capability, forcefulness, influence. For the strong, "power" is a way of life; for the weak, it is oppression. For me, "power" is a definition of one's reason to act in the world. It starts people to act upon their wants, needs, and desires, and causes other people to respond.

I have tried to think about power and whether I am a powerful person. What is the source of my power? Power is the gift my mother gave me, probably the greatest gift she has ever given to me.

The gift is a legacy of my mother's own power. My mother has always acted upon what she believes. She will focus upon a particular idea and will direct and control the circumstances in order to obtain her goal. She does not use a weak woman's power skills of manipulation or slyness, but readily acknowledges her goals and power. She accepts the fact that she has the strength and power to change things in her world. Her example has been valuable to me.

My mother always encouraged my dreams and aspirations. She often gave me sound advice, but would never do major tasks for me. My mother acknowledged women's problems, but told me that we have the power over our situation. She said that to a great extent "we make our own problems, and we have the power to end them. We make our own opportunities." In time, I realized that I had the power to control situations in my own world.

There is power in matriarchy. Matriarchies are alive and well in America. Granted, many families do not have women in control (a majority?), but matriarchies are still

powerful in our society. My family (which includes the extended family of aunts, uncles, cousins) is a woman-controlled family. Women make all the important decisions: financial, family decisions, whatever major problems the family needs to consider. The men in the family are not weak, but consider the women to be wise and knowledgeable. In most instances, the men are in awe of the women. The awe is probably a mixture of confusion, appreciation, and wonder because the women can be wise in so many ways. In such a family, it is difficult at times to recognize that many women are feeling a great sense of hopelessness and weakness.

I am pleased that I was raised in a family that recognized women as valuable, knowledgeable people. I am pleased that my mother was able to express her sense of power to me in a way that also acknowledged the confusion of women's roles. The choices are mine--I can define my sense of power in any way that will work for me. In that way, I can use any of the feminist visions, societal definitions, or family ideas that will help in developing my sense of power. Power was the greatest gift my mother gave me.

Law school has not changed my ideas about power and the image that I have of myself as a powerful person. Instead, law school has confirmed my impressions and beliefs concerning power. It confirms the idea that a law career is a good vehicle or means to gain additional power, or gain recognition of one's existing power.

Law school has not given me any new internal sense of empowerment. My sense of power is something I've had my entire life. People who know me comment on my strength, power, and insight.

The changes have been external. When people learn that I am a law student, they seem to be impressed. Suddenly my opinions have easily gained added weight and credibility, my thoughts have extra value. I'm angry about this new development. I have not changed as a person, but the way in which some people see me has changed. There is no reason for the change in attitude. The law school process has not given me any new special skills, power, or wisdom. Yet, my opinions are considered to be more valuable. It's a shame that the title "lawyer" or "law student" is enough to produce such a reaction. There is a lack of proper focus: a person's creative and cognitive skills should be valued--not just a job title.

One personal goal that I have in becoming a lawyer is having enough power to stop some discrimination against women. Just having legal knowledge and an awareness of the legal system should help fulfill this goal.

RUTH KNIGHT

A Housewife's First Attempt

At Political Speechmaking

Remember the movie, "Wait Until Dark," where the frail, terrified, blind woman smashes every light in the house, arms herself with a butcherknife, and awaits her murderous assailant in the blackness of the night?

Early in life I recognized the vulnerability that accompanied being a conservative female. To attempt to confront political people, on political ground, seemed futile, an exercise in frustration, shame, and punishment. So I learned the art of not disagreeing in public--of pleasing. My public submission was countered by maneuvering in private where I would not be watched. Because the existence of my own personal power was never acknowledged, I was not required to answer for the way I used or abused it. I used power to protect my family and friends. It was also used to manipulate them. I used it for self-preservation. If I needed political power, I chose a political person, and privately channeled my power through him to the public world. Thus my ideas had a chance of being taken seriously, yet I took no public risks. I directly threatened no one. I was routinely underestimated. My self-control was secret. I wore weakness like a Moslem veil, from under which I thought I could see out and no one could see in.

When uncontrollable forces constricted my private world, stifling my maneuvering space, I said to myself, "There is martyrdom in powerful self-control," and endured. When my world tightened still further, threatening to suffocate the energy I breathed into my progeny, my maternal fierceness pierced the barrier. Tossing the veil aside, I faced the larger public sphere I was already in, but not of. "When in Rome, do as the Romans do," I cried, and "Where is a dragon, that I might

slay him?"

The worldly public did not notice my unveiled strength. I still looked weak and invisible. Awkward in wielding unfamiliar weapons, I wounded easily. In chagrin, I finally admitted lack of preparedness, weakness, and despair.

Then an energy from deep within showed me how the veil had distorted my vision. Trials are worthwhile when there is an avenue, however difficult, for overcoming them. Positive human power yields human growth. That growth is necessary to build a better world, public and private. For we are not merely beings, but "human becomings," seeking to become enhanced, fulfilled.

People have, for centuries, believed that their own personal and political enhancement necessitated control and limitation of less essential people. "Less essential people" included a subset consisting of most women. Publicly mastered, women went underground, controlling others subversively, under veils of false weakness.

Thinking men and women hope to co-operate in a more effective power structure which encourages human enhancement for everyone. But reality reminds us that dominant figures in a "dog-eat-dog world" will seek to maintain their status and power with whatever methods available. Submissive women fear to step out into the glaring public light for fear that their faculties for coping in the political arena are stunted or lost. The energy wasted in hiding, in underground maneuvering, or in lurking in the shadows with a butcherknife is negative power which can be transformed.

My passage into public life was ignored, not actively thwarted. Some women already wield effective political power. Publicly successful women must remember their roots, firmly refusing to wield a domineering, negative power which pushes "less essentials" down as the "essentials" advance. I am not suggesting they "grandmother" the girls, only that they use their power to generate public light in which more uncertain women feel comfortable standing. Weaker women must refuse shame; wear sincere weakness until it is worn out. Weakness is not the opposite of power. Women can demonstrate both. All the multitudes who perceive themselves as weak should step out where the public cannot avoid seeing the naked power of their common human dignity, and the diverse powers each

of their lived worlds bring to the whole. The dominant must be reminded that people are not relative, that a courageous woman is not less courageous when a three-star general with nine purple hearts enters the room with her.

Each woman must begin where she is, not where she wishes she was or where someone else thinks she should be. A maturely asserted inner sense of the right to exist may not be influential enough for one to become powerful in the present political world, but it will alter the world enough to count.

JIM ELKINS

To think about power I go back to the years when I was growing up. I identify power with my mother. She was powerful because she was strong. Strong in the sense of having stamina, of going on in the face of adversity. She worked when she was sick, worked when she preferred to be doing something else, worked when any realistic person would have quit. She had a sense of how to live her life, of dedication to the things that needed to be done. Her attention to the task at hand and her knowing that this work was tied to something greater, to some future that she saw as a dream, gave her power. My mother's power came from the strength that she derived from her dream, her hope in the future, hope in the possibilities of a meaningful life for her sons.

The power that I identify with my mother comes from an image of seeing her work. She made demands on herself and those around her. The realization of her dream depended on hard work, stamina, and a belief that doing good work and the benefits of such work made the dream realizable. My father had doubts about the dream and questioned it. It must have seemed to him that it was "her dream," which made it difficult for him to dedicate himself to the tasks that she identified. Others were skeptical and doubted the wisdom of so much effort devoted to children whose future could only be uncertain.

Power is experienced in the context of human relationships. We tend to think of power as domination. One has power, in this view, when one is able to dominate others in a relationship. It is clear from the brief description of my mother, and the images that I have of

her now indicate that she was a dominant figure in the relationship with my father. If my mother was a strong and powerful woman who was able to pursue her dream and to make that dream the family myth, what am I to make of my father, of his power? If mother was dominant, was my father submissive? And if he was not submissive, which he was not, then what images of power do I have from having a non-dominant father?

There are competing visions of how life is to be lived, how families are to work, and how children are to be reared. This statement sounds theoretical and yet I know the truth of it based on my own experience. My brother and I witnessed the competition from ground level, as children. What I am now calling competition was then called "fights." My mother and father fought about things that mattered to them, and if memory serves me well (which it undoubtedly does not), what mattered most was how my brother and I were to be raised, how much attention was to be given to our needs and concerns, our future.

The positions were rather clear-cut. Mom's dream was to give her sons a chance to live in a way that she had not. My father cared for us deeply but had a different vision of how that care was to be manifested. His idea, which I now understand and appreciate better than I did at the time, was to let us make our own way in the world, which to him meant that we would have to work and take care of ourselves as soon as that was appropriate. Mom lived and worked for her sons, my father wanted to use the rewards from his labor for "their" pleasure and not devote everything to "the boys." In his words, "Marjorie, all you think about are those boys." He was right, she did devote too much of her life energy to us, and I can see now how that devotion brought her great comfort and plagued her relationship with my father. By living out her dream, by prevailing in family fights (my father inevitably lost), and becoming a powerful woman, she realized her dream.

At the time, the fights seemed horrendous. They were never conducted behind closed doors. My brother and I always had ringside seats. It's not that Mom and Dad wanted us there to witness the spectacle, but that's where we ended up, and they were too engaged in the action of the moment to find something for us to do while they fought.

Being present for that intense family drama in which the outcome is one's own life has an effect on a child, one that I have come to value. I knew that there were radically different ideas being explicated about what was to happen to me, and it is probably obvious that my mother was able to convince "the boys" that it was essential to our well-being that she prevail. At the time, it seemed absolutely crucial that she prevail. Her winning and the manifesting of her power was something in which I had a vested interest. It becomes obvious as I write that I was watching my mother--my bet was on her--and I remember little of how my father used his kind of power.

What I am struggling with now is that my father has shown me a certain kind of power. The power reflected in my father's life is harder to grasp. It is still shrouded in fog. What does my father and his power mean to me? I have never viewed him as being a weak, submissive, or powerless man. He, like my mother, had a vision of how he wanted to live, how the family was to work, and the role of "the boys" in the family. He "fought" for that vision, trying to temper my mother's more radical altruism and fanatical self-denial.

What do I remember of my father from those family fights? (I call them family fights because we were all present, even though my brother and I did not take part except as spectators.) He articulated his views, though they seldom prevailed, he took a stance when winning was unlikely, he fought for what he believed in without resorting to violence or recrimination. There was a nobility in his stance. I admire him for the courage to hold to his beliefs, and his ability to face the conflict that followed from his effort to move the family in the direction he wanted it to go. His power resided in a belief that he had a life to live and that the financial rewards from his work should at least in part be spent on things that he wanted and needed.

As I look at my own life, the ways that I have chosen to become powerful are closely tied to both my mother and father. Both placed a high value on hard work and making something today which would have the effect of an easier life tomorrow. My mother's power lay in her conviction, self-reliance, stamina, devotion, and love. And I am beginning to see that my father's position in regard to power is much like my own. I live in a world in which the

beliefs of others prevail. I have a different vision, a different sense of what it means to live a good life and how one should be educated for the practice of law and how those are to be related. Like my father, I seldom prevail. So when I think about my own life and living out my own dream I find, to my surprise, that the power of my father presenting his views, fighting for what he believed in, and "carrying on" provides an image of power that I carry with me. Those whose vision does not prevail have a power, and it is this power that I learned from my father.

CHRISTY FARRIS

The word "power" evokes a negative feeling in me. Hitler had power, Stalin had power, Castro has power. The word "powerful" also brings visions of strength, influence, intensity, authority, and energy. I've always been of the notion that "power" corrupts. Those who have power usually want the glory that accompanies it, and, as a consequence, steamroll anyone or anything in their way to achieve it. Individuals and groups have power, but intangibles such as emotions, will, courage, and feelings can be powerful as well.

As an employer I have had the "power" to hire and fire, but didn't consider myself "powerful." Influential, yes. Powerful, no. I have counselled and been listened to, my advice has been heeded, my words noted, but most important of all, I have been respected. This all adds up to influence and not "power." I feel that I am, and am seen as, a strong person. I have a positive sense of who I am. I have been referred to as being a powerful person. But I don't see myself as a powerful person. I feel that I have been powerful on certain occasions, but not consistently. Being powerful implies confidence. And at this point in my life, it ebbs and flows.

SUSAN DALPORTO

When I think of power, I think of control. The ultimate power is control over one's destiny. Can we have control over our destiny? Yes, but many of us feel that we do not have this power.

The cry of the newborn is the first realization of powerlessness. We have no choice but to be born. Our basic needs then force us to look outside ourselves for satisfaction. We begin at birth learning about power and control. We cry until we are blue in the face when we are hungry but are fed according to someone else's schedule. We may be fed whether we are hungry or not.

The quest for approval is instilled in us at an early age. We are told exactly how to perform in order to meet the requirements of being a good girl or good boy. "Speak when spoken to." "Say please and thank you." "Smile." "Be polite." "Come when I call." "You can't do this." "You can (must) do that." "Share." The process goes on until we lose our autonomy. We look outside ourselves for affirmation of self-worth. We can't think for ourselves. Others make decisions for us. While the male is encouraged to be independent, the female learns to acquiesce. Girls are encouraged to give up their selfhood. We (women) give ourselves and become wives and mothers. We are considered selfish if we seek self-fulfillment. We submerge feelings of frustration or discontentment. We acquiesce. We are slaves for our husbands and children and they love us in return. What more could a woman want? A woman could have an identity of her own. She might like to make decisions for herself. She might like to do something besides take care of the needs and desires of others. In other words, she could regain the power and control over her destiny which is her birthright.

Women, no less than men, deserve to be here and have power. We need no one's approval in order to be worthy. Self-worth should come from within, not from those around us. When we realize this, we are on the road to renewal of our power.

We have the power to make decisions which affect our own lives. This private power involves taking control of one's life. It requires introspection. We have to get in touch with our own feelings, needs, wants, desires. This can be very difficult for one who has lived a life controlled by other people's desires. "How do I feel?" "What do I want?"

Selfishness has been defined in a way to make women feel guilty for having desires of their own. When a woman takes control of her life and begins to focus on I, Me, Mine, she is selfish. I call it survival. It is selfdom as

opposed to serfdom. It is the power to control one's destiny. The realization of power in the private sphere is basic. It is a necessary first step before moving into the political sphere.

Women in the public sphere who have not achieved this basic power are a detriment to equality. These women are antagonistic toward other women who move into professional positions. A woman who has not achieved private power who becomes a member of an exclusive group becomes co-opted. She is antifeminist. She enjoys a privileged position and wants no competition. She is special. Phyllis Schlafly is the epitome of this personality. She feels little animosity for the system that has permitted her to reach the top and toward the men who praise her.

Power in the private sphere is a necessary prerequisite to power in the political sphere. We have the power to control our destiny. We have a right to be happy, autonomous persons.

KRISTI TREADWAY

The meaning of power is embedded in patriarchy. The synonyms for power are "impregnable," "overwhelming," "potent," "might," "force," "strong," and "hardened." A politician has power. One who owns oil wells has power. Military leaders have power. Coal companies have power. Husbands have power.

House-keepers do not have power. Wives do not have power. In our society, women like Justice O'Connor, Bella Abzug, and Gloria Steinem, who look and act like men, have power. For a woman to achieve power she must divorce herself from the feminine and become the counterpart of a man. She becomes a copy of the original, not an original herself, not herself. I once tried to express the frustration of gaining masculine power:

Neutered

You, who are my tradition,
you've moulded me,
the once unidentified, into
this reflective contradiction.
Taught me first initials

in phone book listings
til I'm Mrs. Someone else
or George Eliot.
Showed me how to look smart,
to dress conservatively in
somber, tailored suits so as
not to be
noticeably female.
And when he compliments,
"You're so different." I laugh
and only later catch
myself
in the mirror of
his image.

Women have always been a part of the historical and political process. We have been fighting, writing, and arguing. But we have done it our own way, a way devalued in our society. Women have always done great things but no one notices. We have always had our own kind of power, but no one recognizes it. The power of men is miniscule compared to the power of giving birth and raising a child.

Adrienne Rich speaks eloquently of womens' efforts:

Every effort that left no trace...The efforts of women in labor, giving birth to stillborn children, children who must die of plague or by infanticide; the efforts of women to keep filth and decay at bay, children decently clothed, to produce the clean shirt in which he, man, walks out daily into the common world of men, the efforts to raise children against the attritions of racist and sexist schooling, drugs, sexual exploitation, the brutalization and killing of barely grown boys in war. There is still little but contempt and indifference for this kind of work, these efforts.

I want power and success. I want to be a good lawyer. Yet, I want these words to mean the power and success that a woman has. I don't want to join patriarchy, but change it. We will have to change the very values of society.

The lovely landscape of southern Ohio
betrayed by strip mining, the
gold bank on the adulterer's finger
the blurred programs of the offshore pirate
station
are causes for hesitation.
here in the matrix of need and anger, the
disproof of what we thought possible
failures of medication
doubts of another's existence--tell it over and
over, the words
get thick with unmeaning-
yet never have we been closer to the truth
of the lies we were living, listen to me:
the faithfulness I can imagine would be a weed
flowering in tar, a blue energy piercing
the massed atoms of a bedrock disbelief.

Adrienne Rich, When We Dead Awaken

CYNTHIA KOTCHEK

I cannot remember how I perceived power as a child, an adolescent, or even in college. Power became real to me only when I began to work.

Oddly enough, power first became apparent to me in a context involving women. The school system in my rural area was not providing handicapped children with the services that were mandated by state and federal law. In my work, I spoke with mothers of handicapped children about this shortcoming and gradually, over the course of years, urged mothers to push for services for their children. Various aspects of power became clear to me. I saw the political power of the county board of education, the power of personalities within the board, the diffusion of power of the state board of education, the personal power of mothers over their children, the lack of power of the mothers individually and as a group as they encountered the board of education.

As my jobs changed focus, I saw power in different ways. When doing administrative work, I was most discontent with myself in the world: power was a possession

of the top administrators, but even more clearly a possession of the medical doctors in our agency. Power was not merely respect from underlings, or the nicest office, it was making decisions that trickled all the way down to the lowest worker, and all the way out to the individuals, agencies, and companies with which the agency dealt. Through a friendship that developed during my work I saw that power to create change was part of being the top person in one's field. About the time of this perception of power, my work site changed and I viewed power from a completely different perspective: the home. I moved from an office doing administrative work into the field to run a home service for handicapped preschoolers, their mothers, and their siblings. It was there that another kind of power became clear to me: the power of women within their families, and the limitations of that power. Interacting with fathers and siblings gave me a more complete picture. I liked most of the mothers with whom I worked, and even those I disliked evoked my admiration in many ways. Gradually, my ideas of power focused more on the home and less on the politics of office and the world of the agency. My feelings about my own power turned inward and I focused on my own power as it related to my family, to some extent forgetting larger issues of political power. But difficulties in the office where I worked shook my placidity and contentment. They could not be ignored. My anger rose in direct relation to office politics.

Looking back on it, my decision to come to law school seems mostly related to the power question. Was I going to continue being frustrated in my work by being isolated from the power centers which affected me, by not having decision-making power? Could I find a kind of vicarious power through the families with which I worked? I decided that the power-world of women in families could be extremely satisfying to me, but only if I lived it first-hand. With no immediate family of my own in which to immerse myself, my decision was easy. My search for satisfaction turned to work-related choices: graduate school in another field, and a doctorate in my own field.

When I quit work and returned to school, I came to the shocking realization, in dealing with teachers and fellow students, that I had power of which I had been totally unaware. It is a combination of skills I learned at work, insight from working closely with families, and support

provided by my own family. Maybe part of it is just age; I look at younger students and know that they simply have not had time to see some of the things I have seen.

I have come to believe that power in women can come from many sources, and that the power of traditional home networks is just one source. Age can be a power source. Power has roots in the personality. A powerful woman can thrive in the home or at work; her satisfaction depends on the kind of power she needs, as well as her ability to recognize her own inherent power. I have seen women who are unaware that they might have sources of power outside the home, women whose power exists almost entirely outside the home, and women who wield power both inside and outside the home. Women enjoy power and seek it. Women who do not know power outside the home may remain content at home. But when women begin to work, to tap into power of the working world, they rarely retreat from it.

DEBBY WHITE

When I began thinking about "power," I drew a complete mental blank. My experience of trying to visualize power results in a void, a black hole, a perceptual nothingness.

When I say the word "power," I close my eyes and I see these images floating into and out of my head: policemen, the president of the United States, the judge who presided at my divorce hearing. The figures fit the typical pattern:

Virtually all offices charged with responsibility for making or carrying out decisions that affect an entire society have been held by men. Women have seldom exercised authority over groups containing men of equivalent age and social class...Cabinets and legislatures, councils of diplomacy and commerce, assemblies and courts of justice have been almost exclusively populated by males....

Nannerel O. Keohane. "Speaking from
Silence: Women and the Science of

Do I know a single woman whom I perceive as powerful? I sit for a long time, hoping a name will come to me. I begin thinking of significant women in my life. For some reason, I reject them all. That says a lot about my perception of women's power in society today.

Power is still not a part of the idealized female character and even personally powerful women seem resistant to perceiving themselves as such....

Judith M. Bardwick, "Some Notes About Power Relationships Between Women," in A. Sargent, Beyond Sex Roles 332.

I think growing up in Appalachia had a significant impact on my perception of power. There was a definite hierarchy in existence.

Top

MEN
MALE CHILDREN
FEMALE CHILDREN
DOGS
WOMEN

Bottom

I was socialized very early regarding expectations of female behavior. One of these expectations was: Do not speak unless spoken to, in the presence of men. If women's speech is devalued by men, as feminist scholars theorize, does that mean that every time I go into court I am going to be at a disadvantage because I am female? Or are female attorneys an exception to this general rule? Hope springs eternal.

* * * *

I was talking to a woman educator who I would describe as intelligent and informed who asked me what I was studying. Her response to my statement "I'm going to law school" shocked me. She confessed, "I've always been scared of lawyers. They know how to do things that have serious consequences on the rest of your life. What a lawyer says and does means the difference between whether the accused walks free or spends years behind bars or whether the defendant pays the damages or not." I was disturbed by her statement and started thinking about it. I realized for the first time that this woman was saying that lawyers have power.

Since coming to law school, I have become an assertive person. I define this as being powerful. This is a change that has permeated both my personal and professional lives. For some reason that I can't define, it's much easier for me to be assertive on a personal level than on a professional level. One reason could be that I get daily opportunities on a professional level. In fact, I'm enrolled in practice court this semester, which is anxiety provoking. The anxiety comes from having so little experience in being a lawyer. It is so new. It's difficult to be assertive when you're trying on new roles.

Do I see myself as a lawyer, as an empowered self? I've been struggling with that one for days. My initial response is to deny that concept. I tell myself, "No, lawyers are just facilitators. If a client decides to get a divorce, I just file the appropriate papers in the appropriate clerk's office." End of thought. As I write this, I think of domestic violence, safe houses, and temporary protective orders. When a client seeks the aid of an attorney, it is because that attorney has special expertise, knowledge, and knows the magic words. And that skill, that knowledge, is power.

SUSAN SPENCER

Power is outer-oriented. It is necessary to professional or political success. Having power means one can change the world around one. It is different from control, which is dependent on an ability to change people. Control is a

negative, manipulative force, because it is used to break down the inner strength of another. Power, real power, comes ultimately from one's inner strength, rather than control. A powerful person institutes change by her belief in herself. Those around her follow because of her convictions. No use of force is necessary. This means that power does not automatically come from a position or role. While holding some positions may give one the ability to create temporary change, it is no substitute for power linked with inner strength.

Personal strength comes from a stable sense of self. Being strong means one feels little need for comparison. A belief in one's own competence feeds one's power in the external world. Perhaps the two types of strengths are related, because it is through their interaction that strength in relationships affects external power.

I used to feel that confidence in one's competence (which is a strength necessary to power) would flow naturally in time from holding a particular position in society--that a position would lead to positive feedback that would inevitably strengthen ego. The cycle would be self-sustaining--once ego was strengthened, so would my societal position. Now I realize that power comes from a strength that is itself self-sustaining.

As I approach the time when I will, as a lawyer, hold a position that society sees as powerful, I am reminded daily of my feelings of incompetence. How can there be an automatic transformation upon my acceptance of a particular position? I feel that ultimately the change must come from within. I must change before I can become powerful. At the same time, I feel I have a fairly strong core of inner strength. I feel good about my life, about myself. I believe in my own intelligence. Yet that belief stubbornly refuses to transform itself into a belief in my own competence.

While many women have exerted "behind the scenes" power, most have avoided direct positions of power, as have I. This is partially due to the fact that women, with different skills and strengths from men, often fail to measure up to male-created standards. Their failure is mainly due to the nature of interpersonal relationships between men and women. Because many women are nurturers and men are takers (both conditioned by society to be this way), men come out ahead. It becomes a situation where the male self appears "better" than the

female self. This inevitably affects confidence which leads to power. Interpersonal dynamics have a strong effect on womens' position in society. While the ability to care and be giving are positive forces, they lose strength when only women allow them to shine through--and men suppress them. The positive qualities of women keep them from being equals in power with men.

Women gain equal status by encouraging, and even forcing, men to give as well as take. Women can also learn to give less, or at least become more discriminate in their giving. This does not mean women would necessarily become takers, and therefore manipulative.

Women have a potential for power in society. Women have always seemed to be more in touch with their feelings than men. Men have been encouraged to be doers and thinkers. Men, because standards of success have been developed by men, rely on those external standards for comparison of self. But because true power stems from internal strength rather than external position in society, women really have an advantage over men. Being more in touch with self, women have the ability to strengthen that self into a powerful self. If women became aware of this and acted on it, confidence would take the place of fear and great change would result.

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When I'm kneading dough, rolling the full-bodied substance beneath my hands until it becomes elastic, I feel powerful. When I'm standing in my garden, watching the shoots grow in response to my care, I feel powerful. When I'm running, stretching every muscle of my strong body, I feel powerful. I feel most powerful in the private realm of nature. I have had no chance to try my luck at power in the world at large.

My idea of what makes a lawyer had, until my entry into law school, been dominated by media stereotypes. I pictured suits, initialed briefcases, and tinted glasses. There was always something suspicious going on behind the factual context of the case, which only the lawyer knew about. That made lawyers seem suspect, and yet their fabled quickness of mind and tongue redeemed them. I knew no lawyers personally, and assumed they were like a

school of fish, darting quickly beneath the water's surface. Now I know that society makes and labels lawyers. Their general character is assumed as well as the nature of their position in society. Lawyers are assumed to be powerful. Their power is assumed to come both from within and from without, as a natural consequence of their position or status. Lawyers are assumed to be bright and articulate. Lawyers use their wit and power of persuasion to become victors in the adversarial system. They are wonderful when on your side; otherwise they are liars and thieves. Their power takes on a negative cast. So, too, does the outward power that is assumed to come from simply being a lawyer. Lawyers supposedly get what they want merely by the intimidating nature of their position and title. Often a mere threatening letter from one's lawyer gets results. In law school, I have discovered that society's definition of internal power (i.e., wit, persuasion) only scratches the surface of true power. I have also realized that society rewards external power. There is an assumption that men make the best lawyers. I wonder, then, whether my refusal to become a "man" will leave me without external power at all--or whether a different kind of internal power can lead to a new strain of external power.

Law school has tried to sell me an all-or-nothing, one-way ticket to the land of power, but only to territory already staked out by men. It has tried to make me cold, detached, analytical, aggressive, loud, and competitive. It has tried to ready me for the three-piece suits. Quite unintentionally, law school, in combination with my increasing maturity and support from friends, has given me a different sort of power. Not the type of power I had always assumed went with being a lawyer. Rather I have come to a greater understanding of myself--which is a kind of power in itself.

I came to law school having ideas on what lawyers typically did--yet with no concept of where I stood as a potential lawyer. I was interested in law, yet never thought of whether I had the personal characteristics needed to enter the ranks. I had never thought of power. Sucked into the law school machine, I was reminded daily of my apparent weaknesses. I was too soft. My voice was too quiet, no one would ever hear me in a courtroom. I hesitated before asserting myself. I began to feel as though I simply didn't have the makings of a good lawyer. It was

then that I began thinking of power.

I didn't want to give up, to admit defeat. By my second year, I began to notice some changes. I was finding it easier to express myself to people. I was getting used to the sound of my own voice. I was becoming more independent. At the same time I began to become infected with competitive spirit. In other words, I saw both positive and negative changes occurring.

I felt that in the adverse environment of law school I was being tested. Because I was so acutely aware of personal changes, I began to know myself better. I began to know my strengths and weaknesses; what parts of me were liable to change and what parts weren't. I don't think this is the kind of power law school had in mind; it seemed to expect that I would become a blindly confident lawyer.

The knowledge of self-power I've gained is probably not the type that will give me presence in society as a lawyer. The jury may still strain to hear me in the court room; I may still tend to trip on the way in. Thus, society may not look at me as a lawyer. I may be seen as a glorified court reporter. I may be denied the outward power society grants to its lawyers.

If I can attain enough confidence in my abilities to sell my different strengths, society may come to recognize a different breed of lawyer. If it doesn't, I'll still be happy because I have discovered me.

ANN SPANER

Most women do not think of themselves as powerful. While women clearly have power, there is a difference between acknowledging the capacity to exercise some (as yet undefined) power and thinking of oneself as powerful. It is simply a fact of our socialization that a person viewed as "powerful" occupies a position of power--and our culture defines those positions as ones occupied by men in the public sphere--business, politics, law, medicine, and the military--where men are encouraged to assert their powerfulness.

* * * *

When I feel powerful, I feel that I am unstoppable and irresistible due to the strength and courage of my convictions. At those times I am convinced (and persuasive) that my cause is just and true and righteous. Helen Reddy said it first (and she used very masculine language), but at times I truly feel invincible. I experience extreme peaks and valleys in my sense of powerfulness. I suspect that most men experience some sense of powerfulness most of the time and infrequently feel totally powerless. I, on the other hand, fluctuate between the self-righteous confidence of assured powerfulness and regular attacks of abject and frightening powerlessness that depress and confuse me, leaving me with nagging doubts about my self.

I sincerely believe that a more equal distribution of power in society would be an improvement. I am leary of women who would have us believe that if women took over the world, we would change it around and create Shangri-la. It will never happen. Women will find that power, so long coveted and hard won, is not so easy a beast to tame to our wishes. Power corrupts, and there is no convincing evidence that women are immune to the temptation to wield power for their own interest. History doesn't offer any way to predict with any accuracy what women would do as rulers. Women as nurturers, conciliators, and peace lovers might change as their roles in society change. What is clear now is that women are capable and willing to share more equally in the mixed pleasure and pain of exercising public power--and concomitantly many women are more willing to turn back over to men a greater share of the private power in the household.

* * * *

It struck me, when I worked as a receptionist and saw the anxious faces of powerful men eager to learn who had called, that information is power. My limited power as a receptionist came from knowing who was expecting a call from whom (or who didn't want a call at all). Even trivial information can be put to good use.

So it is with law school. The minimum knowledge and information acquired in law school gives a lawyer potential

power to pursue activities on behalf of herself or others. In a sense then, just going to (completing) law school confers a power--a power of knowing where to go, what to read, or who to see to resolve a particular situation.

MICHELLE WIDMER

One's ability or capacity to exercise dominion over other people, places, or things is power. The term "power" is a force or characteristic that most individuals constantly seek. Power is energy concentrated into a potent form which manipulates, dominates, and mesmerizes others. When I consider the meaning of power and its attraction, I imagine figures of authority, command, and respect.

How is power measured? Generally, we assess power by examining one's interior and exterior resources. For example, a person's acquired skills, her personal associations, character, and her financial and material assets all reflect the power and status attained by that individual. Further, educational and cultural attainments, emotional attachments, social skills, and one's natural abilities are also a reflection of power. Power is also reflected in one's physical attributes and (ah yes!) profession. Perhaps this explains the reason why many of us are in law school. I know that I desire power and respect, and feel that the legal profession can assist me in gaining these.

Generally, women are uncomfortable when talking about power, preferring to believe they have none. Men seem to feel that the term "power" carries with it hostile overtones, especially when it is used as an adjective to describe a woman. Actually, power is the ability to satisfy or fulfill one's needs and desires. Power is an asset, a resource, for all females. Women fail to admit and take advantage of the power which is attainable. For decades, centuries, women have been powerless in the "outside" male-dominated world. Yet, during the same period, women have been the figure of power in their world "inside"--the home. As mother, the female controls and molds her children and the path in life they will eventually take; as wife, the female controls and manages the domestic chores and provides the vital support system for her husband.

My life has witnessed the strength and power of

women. I grew up in a family totally dominated by women. My father was out-numbered by three daughters, a wife, and a female cat. My experience with power with my family has been strong and positive. My mother controlled the homefront, dominating the family interests and hobbies and commanding our future path as a family unit. As a result, power has become a desire of mine. I desire power to gain the admiration and respect of others and the power necessary for self-control. Sometimes controlling and advising others is so much simpler than attaining self-control. Power is the art of mastering self-control and the ability to accept things as they are.

Considering the notion of power and how I have viewed myself as an attorney with power has revealed some deep insecurities. The attention and admiration of the people around me has been important since early childhood. My obsessive need for attention and admiration has resulted in a mask of self assurance and self confidence to gain the admiration of others. I have denied my need for approval from others, the insecurity that creeps and crawls through my life. All of this has something to do with my desire for power; the power I manifested in being an attorney.

Since early adolescence I dreamed of the day that I would be an attorney. I envisioned the powerful presence I would create through my appearance of confidence and ability. In the community, the office, the supermarket, a lady lawyer is admired, respected, and powerful. She is seen as intelligent, capable, respected and admired. What could be a more powerful profession for a woman?

However, law school has added another dimension to my image of myself as an attorney. Now, I see the powerful attorney as the person who can manipulate, persuade, frighten, and charm the opposition, the jury, and the client. I have grown, through my legal education, to mold myself as an individual into a powerful attorney. Law school has pointed out and stressed the importance of power to me. It is no longer a game or image; it is harsh reality. Further, I am beginning to realize that a powerful person does not need or desire the attention or approval of others. Rather, the powerful person draws the attention or approval of others by just being herself and doing as she wishes. By doing this, she reveals self-confidence, self-control, and an independence that is the very root of power.

How is this realization related to a sense of becoming more powerful as a member of the legal community? In identifying my weaknesses and realizing where I need to improve as a person, it is possible to work at overcoming these weaknesses and attaining self-confidence and the independence required to be a powerful person.

Although most of the weaknesses I had when I came to law school are still present, I have been able to identify and confront them. Although law school has increased my overall insecurity, my legal education has taught me to be courageous and strong enough to mask the insecurity and move on. In addition, my law school experience has given me the opportunity for the first time to view myself as a powerful person in relation to my talents, abilities, intelligence, and relationships. I now know my strengths and weaknesses. Power is within my grasp.