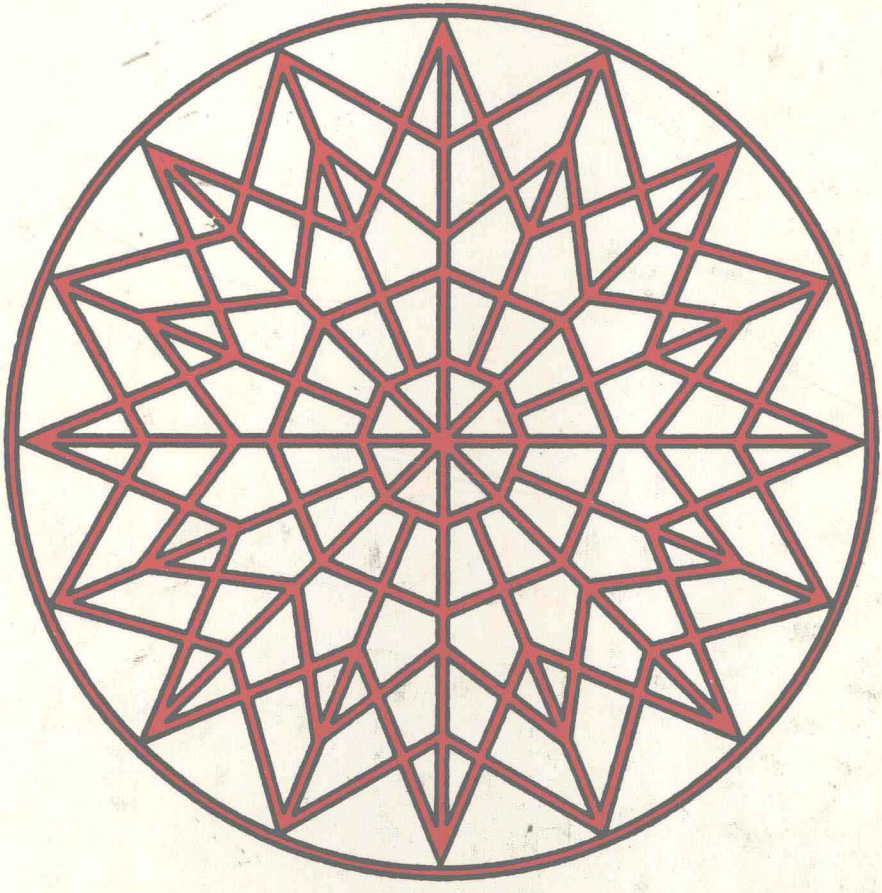
DAVID C. McCLELLAND

POWER

THE INNER EXPERIENCE



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POWER
The Inner Experience

PREFACE

THIS BOOK has been a long time in the making. I have been thinking about power motivation for most of my professional life; at the least since 1950, when Joseph Veroff made his first attempt to arouse the power motive experimentally. The important further work in defining and measuring the power motive by James Uleman and David Winter in the mid-1960's, culminating as it did in Winter's important book, *The power motive* (1973), gave my thinking along these lines on added stimulus. Unexpectedly our ten-year study of the effects of alcohol on fantasy also shed light on an aspect of the need for Power. But it was not until the early 1970's that it all seemed to come together, at least at the theoretical level. I suddenly thought that I saw a connection between our empirical work on power motivation and the theories of Freud and Erikson. The result is Chapter 1 of the present volume, which provides a theoretical synthesis of these two very different traditions in psychology.

The theory made such good sense to me and to others to whom I showed it, that I immediately used it both to interpret earlier work I had done, and to explain some newer phenomena which were

fascinating me. Among the latter was the conversion to Hinduism of my former student and colleague, Dr. Richard Alpert, and his subsequent leading role among a large group of intelligent but alienated young people in America. I spent most of a sabbatical year (1972–1973) in India and Sri Lanka, trying to seek out the roots of these phenomena, particularly in the Eastern view of power. My conviction grew that I was on the right track, and I completed much of the present volume while I was there. My original intention had been to write a more theoretical book; but as the year wore on, my lifelong commitment to empirical validation of psychological theories got the better of me. I wanted to know to what extent my theory could be validated by the empirical and statistical research methods commonly employed in contemporary psychology. Fortunately at this very moment, Abigail Stewart developed a promising measure of Erikson's stages of ego development which made an empirical test of the theory possible. So I decided to postpone publication for a year while I sought for empirical validation of the theory.

The casual reader may not realize what such a decision cost me. For I thought I had developed an exciting new theory which made good sense out of a lot of diverse phenomena and which others felt represented an important breakthrough. Yet I was proposing to jeopardize the whole thing by putting it to the empirical test. What if the results did not confirm the theory? That all too often happens in psychology.

To be honest, it happened at first in the present instance. In a mad scramble to collect data in time to complete this book for the original target publication date a year ago, I decided to obtain the information I wanted from subjects who were serving in an experiment designed for an entirely different purpose. In order to do that, I had to make some compromises that went against my better judgment: the motive measures had to be obtained from the verbal cues used as part of the other experiment. Ever since we reported in *The Achievement Motive* (1953) that verbal cues do not always give the same results as picture cues, I have been dubious about using verbal cues to assess motive variables. Even more important, I had to be satisfied with the other experiment's subject pool, consisting of summer school students at Harvard University. From my point of view they had three distinct drawbacks: they were too young, most of them were unmarried, and nearly all of them were from the educated middle class. Since my research dealt in particular with the characteristics of maturity, it seemed unwise to limit my sample

to people in their late teens and early twenties who would not yet have experienced serious adjustments to work and family life. But at any rate I tried it, just to see what would happen.

The result was disastrous. It turned out that the subjects resented having to fill out all the extra forms my research required in addition to what they had to do for the other experiment. And not a trace of what I was looking for appeared in the data. What to do? Was the theory wrong, or should I try again on a better sample? I chose the latter course, with the results reported in Chapters 2 and 8. To my infinite relief, the empirical findings on an adult, more representative sample of people did support in the main my theoretical views as already written into the rest of the book. For those readers who feel that I hunted around amidst all my correlations only to report those that fit the theory, let me reassure them that if the data don't fit the theory, there is no way you can make the results come out right. I tried it in the previous study and failed. It was, therefore, with an even greater feeling of satisfaction that I began to uncover some empirical justification for the theory. I had put the theory in jeopardy, and in the process it had been confirmed and refined.

All this would not have been possible without help from many sources—from Harvard University for a sabbatical leave with half pay; from the National Science Foundation Grant #GS31914X for a study of power and application motives; from my colleagues at McBer and Company for their advice and help in collecting the data reported in Chapter 8; and from my graduate assistants Susan Fiske, Cathy Colman, Robert Watson, and Betsy Harrington, who helped collect, organize, and score the data reported in Chapters 2 and 8. I am grateful to them all. Above all, I owe a special debt to Abigail Stewart and David Winter, who helped formulate many of the ideas in the book. It is no exaggeration to say that without their help the book could not have been written in its present form. Abigail Stewart developed the Social Emotional Maturity scale and the original version of the questionnaire designed to test characteristic expressions of the power motive at different levels of maturity. David Winter helped with these matters and also carried out the final computer analysis of the data. They have been true colleagues and friends throughout. Ram Dass also helped. He read the section on his life, suggested changes more in line with the facts, and helped me understand better the Stage IV orientation towards power.

I also wish to acknowledge with great thanks the fast and efficient help of Martha Adams in preparing the manuscript for publication. She has typed and re-typed various versions and helped check references with a single-minded devotion to meeting the deadline of my departure for Asia, where I hope to find out even more about the role of power in human life.

Alwatte, Sri Lanka
West Cornwall, Connecticut, David C. McClelland

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CHAPTER 1

WAYS OF EXPERIENCING POWER

MAN HAS always been fascinated by power. He has reason to be for, as scholars are fond of reminding him, he belongs to a violent species. Look at his history: a long succession of wars with interludes of peace in localized times and places. His myths and his religion are saturated with concern for power.

The Judaeo-Christian God is almighty. "The voice of the Lord is powerful; the voice of the Lord is full of majesty. The voice of the Lord breaketh the cedars; yea, the Lord breaketh the cedars of Lebanon . . . the Lord will give strength unto His people." "All things were made by Him: without Him wasn't anything made that was made." Jesus said to his followers "He that believeth in Me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do . . . ye shall receive power."

In the ancient Chinese Book of Changes, the *I Ching,* there is likewise concern about power—the taming power of the small, the taming power of the great, the power of the light, the power of the

dark, the possession in great measure. In the central episode of the Hindu epic, the *Bhagavad Gita,* Arjuna faces a problem of exercising or not exercising power in the war against his kindred. Should he fight or not? The advice given him is that he must fight because it is his duty, but that he should so act as not to be attached to the outcome of his actions; he must feel neither success nor failure, nor joy nor sorrow, whatever the outcome of his actions. It almost seems that religions represent books of changes on the eternal theme of how to deal with man's power relationships. In religion man strives to understand forces greater than himself along with his own urges to attack and destroy or to defend himself against his fellow man.

The need for understanding the psychology of power is even greater today, when man's capacity for destroying himself and the universe has reached a new level of seriousness. The threat of nuclear destruction has not, somewhat surprisingly, evoked an adaptive response, even from thinking and sensitive people. At first it elicited horror and a number of Utopian schemes for controlling man's aggressive urges. Then, as little progress was made toward putting the schemes into effect, people began to adapt to the stress by forgetting it. Even a certain cynicism, mixed with despair, developed; older theories about man's innate agressiveness were revived and gained wide currency. Particularly among the young, groups of people decided, as the Hindus had centuries ago, that to try to eliminate power and power schemes at the social level is hopeless. Rather, an individual should renounce thoughts of power, cultivate his own soul, and live under enlightenment, free from power-based commitments to change the world.

Has the science of psychology anything to contribute to the resolution of these problems? The only power it has is the power to give man added understanding; knowing what underlies his behavior should put man in a better position to control or redirect his destructive tendencies. Yet psychology as an empirical science is a late-comer among those disciplines that have tried to understand the nature of man. Where religion, philosophy, common sense have long dominated the field, to put empirical psychology among them is like putting David among Goliaths. It has its slingshot—that is, a systematic method for measuring and establishing relationships among variables—but to those who are used to the grand sweep of assertion and counterassertion about human nature, it will seem puny indeed, woefully inadequate to a task that has confounded thinking men for centuries. Yet our goal in this volume is no less: it is to report empirical studies of the psychology of power in an effort to arrive at a

better understanding of the role of power in human life. More specifically, it focuses on the power motive, that desire for power which plays a major role in the shaping of the human condition. What is its nature? Whence does it come? How does it express itself? Can it be controlled? From what do the pathologies of power derive? Answers to questions like these should give us not only greater understanding but power; for knowledge is also power, the power to alter what we are doing in the light of our better understanding of it.

Measuring the Power Motive

Attempts to isolate and measure the power motive were begun around 1950 and have continued at Harvard University, the University of Michigan, and Wesleyan University. Findings have been reported in a number of scientific papers, and in books such as Veroff's and Feld's *Marriage and work in America* (1970), or *The drinking man* by McClelland and others (1972). Practically all of this work has now been brought together and described in full in an important book by David Winter, entitled simply *The power motive* (1973).

It is worth outlining with some care the approach taken by these studies, because many psychologists, particularly those of a clinical persuasion, have written extensively on the subject basing their conclusions chiefly on case studies of individuals. (See for example *Power and innocence,* by Rollo May, 1972.) The empirical approach to the measurement of power motives started with the simple assumption that a measure of something ought to co-vary demonstrably with the thing it measures. The reason we assume that the column of mercury in a vacuum provides a good measure of heat or temperature is that, as we apply heat to a glass tube containing the mercury, the mercury rises, and as we take the heat away, the mercury falls. The problem in measurement is to arrive at an indicator that will reflect changes in whatever is being measured, and those changes *only.* Thus the purpose of the studies designed to measure the power motive was to implant or arouse power motivation in individuals, and then to search for behavioral indicators sensitive enough to reflect the presence or absence or degree of intensity of the motive that had been implanted.

Many possible behavioral indicators have disadvantages. After arousing the power motive in one way or another, one could in effect ask a person, "How powerful do you feel?" or "How aggressive do