

SURFACING POWER DYNAMICS

Social power can be defined as **the ability to shift the dynamics of a system**. Power can be exercised by humans and non-humans in a variety of ways, both overt and covert.

In social permaculture, one of our practices is to use flows of social power to create the conditions for group vitality, individual agency and collective liberation. That usually entails:

- **Observing** the current power dynamics in the system, and how those dynamics are impacting individuals and the system as a whole
- **Surfacing** hidden power dynamics and gaining confidence talking about them
- **Designing** interventions to shift power dynamics in ways that align with our vision and values

In this activity, we'll examine four ways that power can work in collaborative groups, reflect on how we have experienced different kinds of power, and discuss how power is showing up in this course.

Four Types of Power

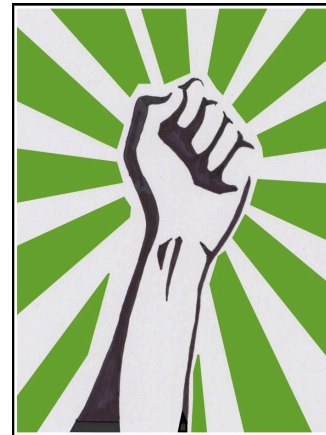
The chart below describes four kinds of power that may exist in social systems (note that these aren't the only forms that power can take). Spend a few moments to familiarize yourself with these.

POWER OVER
also known as: Domination



This type of power is common in our society. For example, bosses have power over our livelihoods, law enforcement has power over our bodies, and capitalism has power over extraction of value from natural systems.

POWER TO
also known as: Agency, Choice



This is the power TO do whatever you choose to do.

This can also manifest as privilege. If your neighbor had the opportunity to go to college without any student loan debt, but you did not, then they may have had more “power to,” or agency, with regard to their higher education choices than you did.

SPIRITUAL POWER

also known as: Self Worth



This type of power is often subtle to spot. Examples might include a person's (or a community's) capacity to stay steady and peaceful amidst extreme stresses, or the capacity to act from compassion and wisdom.

POWER WITH

also known as: Cooperation, Solidarity



This type of power allows us to accomplish things together that we could not do alone through coordination and trust.

Cooperative businesses, labor unions and movements for civil rights are all about communities organizing their “power-with”!

Surfacing Power Dynamics Part 1: Observe and Interact

In this solo and group activity, we'll metabolize the above information around power by observing how power arises in our personal lives and relationships.

1. Take a moment to muse and reflect on the distinctions between different types of power as they have shown up in your life—in your family, friendships and even in your self-care practices. As you reflect, notice how each of the four categories above bring different situations to mind. Which of them tug on your heart, letting you know that there's something there to explore?
2. Next, take about two minutes each to share what's surfacing for you. Some prompts that might help get you going:
 - *How are power dynamics present in your relationship to yourself? In your self-care goals and practices?*
 - *What power dynamics were embodied in your family growing up? (Extend compassion and gentleness to yourself as you invite memories that may be difficult or painful).*
 - *How do you see power dynamics surfacing in your past and current friendships and vocational/professional relationships?*

Surfacing Power Dynamics Part 2: Obtain a Yield

Once everyone has had a chance to share, take a pause.

Then turn your attention to these questions:

- *How do you see any of the four types of power - or other power dynamics - embodied within the Dharma of Resistance course?*
 - *For example: in the full group sessions, in the mini-pod gatherings, in the course contents, etc.*
- *Are these dynamics supporting or detracting from the conditions for group vitality, individual agency and collective liberation?*

Please practice grace and sensitivity when bringing up specific examples—but specific examples are welcome as we work to bring these abstract concepts to bear in our work together.

You are also encouraged to practice “windows of tolerance,” noticing your body, and asking for a pause as you proceed to share and listen about how power dynamics are showing up in your experiences.

Take turns developing the conversation and bringing it to maturity, being mindful of how much time each person is taking and making sure everyone has a chance to share.