

Abilene Christian University

Digital Commons @ ACU

Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Spring 5-2019

Power Shift within a Couple's Journey through Addiction

Carly Brack Marketto
ckb17a@acu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.acu.edu/etd>



Part of the [Marriage and Family Therapy and Counseling Commons](#), and the [Substance Abuse and Addiction Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Brack Marketto, Carly, "Power Shift within a Couple's Journey through Addiction" (2019). Digital Commons @ ACU, *Electronic Theses and Dissertations*. Paper 134.

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Electronic Theses and Dissertations at Digital Commons @ ACU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ ACU.

ABSTRACT

Addiction is a rapidly growing problem for many couples, but most treatment plans focus solely on the individual with a substance abuse diagnosis rather than taking a systemic approach. Investigating the power dynamics of couples who have been through addiction and recovery could assist future treatment plans to include underlying factors in relationships instead of only addressing symptoms of the problem. This grounded theory research study strives to understand the power shift within couples when one partner goes from being in active addiction to being sober for one year or more. Power is viewed through the four aspects that Knudson-Martin and Mahoney (2009) developed, which include relative status, well-being, attention to the other, and accommodation patterns. Interviews were conducted using four grand tour questions based on Knudson-Martin and Mahoney's (2009) characteristics of power, then data was analyzed using the four-step process described by Charmaz (2006). The resulting model illustrated how power changes as this couple transitioned from active addiction to recovery.

Power Shift within a Couple's Journey through Addiction

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Marriage and Family Studies

Abilene Christian University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Marriage and Family Therapy

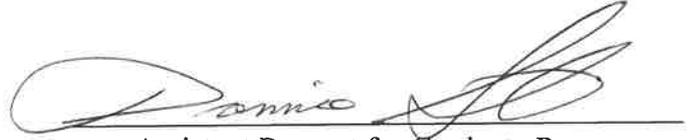
By

Carly Brack Marketto

May 2019

This thesis, directed and approved by the committee for the thesis candidate, Carly Brack, has been accepted by the Office of Graduate Programs of Abilene Christian University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

Master of Marriage and Family Therapy



Assistant Provost for Graduate Programs

Date

5-13-19

Thesis Committee

Lisa Merchant

Lisa Merchant, Chair

Lisa Powell

Lisa Powell (Mar 19, 2019)

Lisa Powell

Dale E. Bertram

Dale E. Bertram (Mar 19, 2019)

Dale Bertram

To my Grandad, Arno Massey.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	LIST OF FIGURES	iii
I.	INTRODUCTION	1
	Overview and Definitions	1
	Statement of Problem.....	2
	Research Questions.....	2
II.	REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE	4
	Power	4
	Accommodation Patterns and Influence	6
	Relative Status	7
	Attention to Other	7
	Well-Being.....	8
	Addiction.....	8
	Power and Addiction.....	9
III.	METHODOLOGY	11
	Grounded Theory	11
	Participants.....	11
	Data Collection and Interviews.....	12
	Data Analysis	13
	Initial Coding	14

	Focused Coding	14
IV.	RESULTS	16
	Overview of Results.....	16
	The Three-Stage Power Shift.....	16
	Drinking Phase.....	17
	Shifting Phase	18
	Sobriety Phase.....	19
V.	CONCLUSION.....	21
	Discussion	21
	Limitations	22
	Contribution to Literature	23
	REFERENCES	24
	APPENDIX: Institutional Review Board Approval Letter.....	28

LIST OF FIGURES

1. Figure 1: The Three-Stage Power Shift	20
--	----

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Overview and Definitions

Good versus evil and the struggle for power are common threads throughout stories told over thousands of years. This fascination with power does not stop in fictional stories though; it is seen in families and relationships also. In relationships, people might knowingly or unknowingly act in a way that keeps the power dynamics stable. This could happen through many different avenues, but this will focus on how power dynamics and substance abuse are affected. These power dynamics could affect their substance abuse and possibly change during the recovery process. Understanding this process could lead to more informed treatments and couple therapies for people journeying through addiction.

The purpose of this research is to see how power changes within the relationship throughout the addiction and recovery process. There have been a few studies showing the power within couples and its effects, but none that include addiction (Knudson-Martin, 2013; Loscocco & Walzer, 2013). In fact, it was not until recently that addiction was being researched systemically (Rowe, 2012; Stanton & Todd, 1982). Working with addiction from a systemic perspective can increase the chances of a successful recovery, and the power dynamics of a couple could play a major role in the relationship dealing with addiction.

For this study, power is defined by four aspects: accommodation patterns, relative status, attention to other, and well-being (Knudson-Martin & Mahoney, 2009). These four aspects of power were observed between a couple who have journeyed through addiction. The criteria for this study required one partner to have had a substance abuse problem and be in recovery for at least a year. The substances being abused must have been alcohol and/or illicit drugs. The husband who participated in this study, Tom, met criteria for a moderate alcohol use disorder as described by the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Health Disorders* (5th ed.; *DSM-5*; American Psychiatric Association, 2013) and has been in recovery for over two years. This study will view his relationship to his wife Susan, the non-using partner (NUP), through the lens of power within the relationship and how that shifted during sobriety.

Statement of Problem

Power as a social construct and its effects on organizations have been studied, but there is less research on power within relationships and family systems. Further, there is no research on the power dynamics of relationships having to deal with addictions. Using Knudson-Martin and Mahoney's (2009) aspects of power, more characteristics of relationships could be studied than before. Focusing on addictions from this view could fill that research gap and lead to more helpful treatment options for couples.

Research Questions

This research desires to understand the power dynamic of relationships that have successfully worked through the hardships of addiction. When viewing relationships through this lens of power, understanding who has more power in the relationship during the addiction could help to understand how power is enabling the addiction. Along with

that, understanding the power shift throughout recovery and sobriety could lend more tools to treating couples struggling with addiction. Approaching this research from a qualitative, grounded theory standpoint, the questions that were asked focused on the social processes that occur and how the changes happen. The researcher asked about each aspect of power that Knudson-Martin and Mahoney (2009) posited, and the participant answered from their perspective during the addiction and after the recovery process began. These open-ended questions led to the researcher asking about whether there was change and how that change occurred. The researcher asked questions such as, “How much do you accommodate for your partner currently?” and, “How much did you accommodate during the addiction?” Examples were provided in case further explanation was necessary. These questions allowed the participants to share their answers with minimal guidance.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

Power is a main motivator and underlying factor in all relationships, but there is little research to explain the dynamics of power and the effect it has on couples. Perhaps this is because couples have a difficult time recognizing power in their own relationship. In fact, many couples will claim the power in their relationship is equal because they are unable to see the inequality within the relationship (Knudson-Martin & Mahoney, 2009). This power dynamic between partners can contribute to the success or detriment of couples, especially during times of trial. For couples working through a substance abuse problem, this power dynamic could play a major role in their recovery. Even though substance abuse affects 21.5 million Americans (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2015) and their respective partners, research is mainly dedicated to approaching the problem on an individual level versus a systemic approach. Not viewing the pain and hurt that is caused by substance abuse as affecting the entire system creates a narrow, unsuccessful treatment plan. Looking at substance abuse and recovery through the lens of power could create a better understanding of addiction and relationships, leading to more successful treatment plans.

Power

Power was a controversial topic in the family therapy field when foundational thinker Gregory Bateson shed some light on his thoughts of power. Bateson believed that power was a unrealistic concept that should not be given more thought because there was

no way one person could have complete power in a relationship because of the relational dynamics (Bateson, 1972). It was not until Foucault (1986) that power was discussed as interactional and able to be seen within the relationship dynamics. Even though Bateson (1972) thought it was toxic to discuss power, when viewing it relationally as Foucault did, it could be toxic not to discuss for couples. Outside of family therapy, power was studied within sociology and psychology using social exchange theory (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). Later, Kipnis, Schmidt, and Wilkinson (1980) observed the relationship between power and influence in organizations and found that people use their power to influence others to achieve certain benefits or behaviors. These foundational findings are still influencing research. Along the same lines, de Shazer (1988) defined power as the influence that a person has over another. This is reiterated and expanded by Knudson-Martin and Mahoney (2009) when they defined power as the ability for a person to influence their partner towards their own well-being, goals, and interests. Inequality exists when this power is used in a self-serving way. When there is equality within the relationship, the goals and interests of each person are considered, which is optimal for the success of the couple. If the power is unbalanced, both partners can suffer.

Relationships are more complex with more variables than the power dynamics we see in business or peer groups, though, which is why this research study uses Knudson-Martin and Mahoney's (2009) definition of power, which has four aspects: accommodation patterns, relative status, attention to other, and well-being. Examining these four aspects of a relationship will provide an understanding of the power within relationships.

Accommodation Patterns and Influence

Power and influence are intricately tied together, and this is apparent within couple dynamics. The definitions of power posited by de Shazer (1988) and Knudson-Martin and Mahoney (2009) both referenced influence, which is why accommodation patterns is an important aspect of a relationship to measure in the study. Accommodation patterns consider how each partner is willing to be influenced by the other, such as creating their schedule around their partner's (Knudson-Martin & Mahoney, 2009). Steil (1997) found that when studying marital couples, both men and women are more likely to be intimate and open with their partner when they feel there is equal influence between them. Gottman, Coan, Carrera, and Swanson (1998) demonstrated the importance of this influence within relationships by finding that men who are unwilling to be influenced by their partner have an 81% risk of getting divorced. This unwillingness to be influenced by a partner shows how unequal power dynamics lead to an unsuccessful marital outcome.

Negative influence on a partner can be just as detrimental to the relationship as not allowing any influence from the partner. In fact, this negative influence and unequal power dynamic can affect a partner's substance abuse more so than affecting other behaviors such as exercise (Cornelius, Desrosiers, & Kershaw, 2016). Their study observed younger couples' healthy behaviors, such as eating and exercise, but also substance abuse, and it was found that influence may be more pronounced during trials. As the person with lesser power is influenced and accommodating to another person, the influencer with higher power also starts to value themselves and others differently (Rind & Kipnis, 1999). For example, if a person is authoritative, they might view themselves as

dominant and the other person as submissive (Rind & Kipnis, 1999). Therefore this accommodation and influence aspect of power changes the entire system of the couple.

Relative Status

Along with the effects accommodation has on a relationship, the relative status affects the relationship quality. Knudson-Martin and Mahoney (2009) defined relative status as “who has the right to have, express, and achieve goals, needs, and interests” (p. 11). For example, there is a power inequality in regard to relative status when a husband feels comfortable telling his wife that he is changing jobs, but maybe she does not feel comfortable telling him she wants to go back to school. When a partner perceives that their interests and goals are being supported in the relationship, the quality is increased (Molden, Lucas, Finkel, Kumashiro, & Rusbalt, 2009). Relative status can also be measured by how household chores are divided amongst partners (Knudson-Martin & Mahoney, 2009). Presently, heterosexual couples still have a difficult time dividing household chores equally between both partners (Smart, Brown, & Taylor, 2017). Measuring relative status is similar to accommodation in the way that whoever feels comfortable expressing their ideas and goals defines what is done, thereby creating the schedule of the relationship. Feeling open and comfortable to express these ideas is an important aspect of the relationship to measure the power dynamics.

Attention to Other

The next aspect important to the power dynamics of relationship is the amount of attention given to each other. This can be how much a partner listens to the other, how attuned they are to their partner, or how much they appreciate small acts that their partner does. The person with more power in the relationship might be less likely to pay attention

to their partner (Fiske, 1993). People with more power are often less aware of or attuned to their partner's needs because they are systematically taught to not see these inequalities (Parker, 2009). Because the partner with more power makes the decisions and decides the amount of attention given, the person in the relationship with less power will pay more attention to their partner because they control their fate (Fiske, 1993).

Well-Being

Well-being in this study looks at each partner's access to healthcare, physical fitness, and mental health care. If one partner has more access to any of these things, then that could be a sign of a power inequality (Knudson-Martin & Mahoney, 2009). Along with an ability to access these things, power inequality can also be shown in the well-being of each individual. When one person believes they have more control or power, their illusion of control can often give them better mental health (Taylor & Brown, 1988). These speak to the inequality of power in a relationship affecting well-being, but their well-being can be affected positively as well. Couples with high relationship satisfaction are healthier and have a tendency to live longer (Whisman, Gilmour, & Salinger, 2018).

Addiction

Over 21.5 million American adults struggle with substance abuse, with over 80% of them abusing alcohol (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2015). This costs the United States over \$440 billion annually for healthcare, employment, and crime (National Institute on Drug Addiction, 2017). Since this affects so many Americans and costs billions of dollars annually, research on addiction can be helpful and applicable immediately. Substance abuse has been a growing epidemic for decades, with most research being poured into medical model-based individual treatment.

Starting with adolescents, practitioners slowly began including families in substance abuse treatment. Rowe (2012) noted that after seeing successful results with adolescents, they began working with adults and their families to address their substance abuse. Practitioners started to realize that substance abuse was influenced not only by the individual but by the family and environment of the individual. This led to some treatment options such as community reinforcement and family training (CRAFT) and behavioral couples therapy (BCT) that are still being explored but have been successful so far (Rowe, 2012).

Some of the research that led to familial involvement in addiction treatment was Stanton and Todd's (1982) work applying earlier family systems treatment models to adolescents abusing substances. Later, Steinglass, Bennett, Wolin, and Reiss (1987) looked at people with alcoholism and the way their spouse and other family members adapted to that alcoholism. He saw that spouses will adopt roles and create rituals to accommodate their alcoholic loved one, such as walking on eggshells around them occasionally. Family treatment of substance abuse used to be focused solely on alcoholism, and other substances have just recently been researched. The importance of working with families is not lost in this niche of research, though. Spouses and other family members are key in engaging a substance abuser in treatment (Meyers, Miller, Smith, & Tonigan, 2002).

Power and Addiction

Power and, by extension, powerlessness have been a part of the addiction field for as long as Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) has existed. Power is what a person surrenders to when beginning a 12-step program. Lobsinger (1997) addresses this type of power when

discussing gambling addictions. He refers to the power dynamics between couples when a person is addicted, saying that the spouse (most likely the woman) will become overly dependent during her spouse's addiction. Bepko and Krestan (1985) created a theory involving gender and alcoholism that posited that alcohol stabilizes systems with imbalanced power. Partners viewed through this theoretical lens were either over- or under-responsible, and alcohol was the solution. This view of responsibility stemmed from the gender roles that the patriarchal society taught each partner (Bepko & Krestan, 1985). In *Feminism and Addiction*, Laikind (1991) used a case study to demonstrate this theory, and both partners were struggling with their alcoholism. This theory is often used to help partners who each have their own alcohol use disorder. This minuscule amount of research involving addictions and power only considers one narrow definition of power and couples who are both abusing substances. This research will observe power using a relational definition and also note the changes in power throughout the journey of addiction. By examining the changes in the relationship during and after addiction, this research could contribute to the small amount of relational theories working with addictions.

CHAPTER III
FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

Grounded Theory

Glaser and Strauss (1967) developed grounded theory to integrate theoretical design with research from a positivist perspective. Years later, Charmaz (2006) approached grounded theory with a slightly different viewpoint. To update the theory with modern research and theoretical development, she used grounded theory to construct theories with quality data from the entire process of collection and analyzing. This qualitative research study uses Charmaz's (2006) grounded theory framework to observe the social processes and changes at work during a couple's transition from struggling with substance abuse to being in recovery. This framework allows the researcher to have an open mind about what changes, if any, occur during this journey for couples and the reason for those changes according to each partner. The role of the investigator is to allow the participants to share their views of events that transpired with no interrogation type questioning or agenda.

Participants

Flyers posted in various AA and Al-Anon groups, batterers intervention prevention programs, and the Marriage and Family Institute were used to recruit participants. The study also recruited participants via social media and the Abilene Christian University Masters of Marriage and Family Therapy alumni list serve. All possible participants were screened over the phone according to the criteria approved by

the Abilene Christian University Institutional Review Board (Appendix). Participants had to be over 18 years of age and in a committed, heterosexual relationship. The criteria required the partner who abused substances to have been in recovery for at least one year. Originally, about 6-12 heterosexual couples were wanted for this study, but only one couple passed the criteria and moved onto the interview phase. Both partners reviewed and signed an informed consent before participating in the study via SurveyMonkey. They were each compensated \$10 for participating in the study.

The participants in this study were both non-Hispanic Caucasians from a Southwestern state and in their mid-thirties. Their estimated annual income was approximately \$60,000 and they have two daughters, a teenager and a toddler. The couple have been married for more than 10 years, and Tom has been sober from alcohol for about two years. He admitted to having an alcohol use disorder, and described during the interview meeting criteria in the *DSM-5* such as craving alcohol, building a tolerance to alcohol, spending copious amounts of time drinking, and drinking more than planned on different occasions. These criteria being met would describe a moderate alcohol use disorder (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Susan is the Non-Using Partner (NUP) for this participating couple.

Data Collection and Interviews

Participants signed the consent form and completed a demographic questionnaire via SurveyMonkey that covered their relationship status, length of the relationship, race/ethnicity, age, annual income, drug of choice, length of addiction, and length of sobriety. It also included statements such as, “I feel comfortable sharing my thoughts with my partner,” and, “I concede first during a fight,” that the participants rate as

“mostly true” or “mostly false,” based on the period during the addiction and currently. These questions primed the participants to start thinking about the power dynamic of their relationship and stem from the definition of power posited by Knudson-Martin and Mahoney (2009). After the questionnaire was completed, the couple requested to be interviewed separately because of child care reasons. Both partners denied feeling unsafe or fearing retaliation. The interview began by explaining the aspects of power and giving the participants a few minutes to think about their responses. After a few minutes of brainstorming, the interviewer asked four grand tour questions to see how each aspect of power is viewed within the relationship: 1) “How is influence viewed in your relationship currently?” 2) “Tell me about the attention shared between you and your spouse,” 3) “How much do you accommodate for your partner currently?” and 4) “How are each of you taking care of your health now?” The researcher prepared examples for each aspect of power, but the couple only needed an example for accommodation. The researcher used follow-up questions to explore how aspects have changed since the addiction and when that change occurred. They shared their thoughts with little guidance from the investigator, so that they could tell their full story without agenda or influence. Each interview lasted about 30 minutes, so an hour was dedicated to the couple as a whole.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was based on Charmaz’s (2006) view of grounded theory. Throughout the data analysis, the researcher kept memos so that thoughts about the process could be noted. Constant comparative analysis was going to be used but is difficult to do with one couple participating, so that was not relied on heavily. After the interviews were transcribed, the first step was to code each line using gerunds to analyze

what is happening in the process. Following that, the researcher divided each line into categories and then re-coded transcripts based on the categories. Next, the researcher found the limits of each category. When the limits were set, the researcher saw how each category flowed together in the process. These last two steps are defined as axial coding. Since only one couple was able to participate in this study, the research was unable to reach saturation.

Initial Coding

Charmaz (2006) described this first stage of initial coding as trying to “see actions in each segment of data rather than applying preexisting categories to the data” (p.47). This approach allowed the researcher to be open to what the data is showing, and constructing meaning from those interpretations. By moving quickly and remaining open to the data throughout the transcript, the researcher was able to identify 85 gerunds from both partners transcripts. Ultimately, there was about a gerund for every 1-2 lines of transcript. Since the interview moved interchangeably from current feelings of power in the relationship to power dynamics during the addiction, the initial coding gerunds were not in chronological order but rather pertaining to each aspect of power.

Focused Coding

The 85 gerunds that were gathered through open, line-by-line coding represented the sum of the transcript that covered all aspects of power throughout addiction and sobriety. To focus the codes and start to arrange them into categories after they had been compared and analyzed, the researcher created three categories and developed the limits of those categories. The three categories were (1) drinking phase, (2) shifting phase, and

(3) sobriety phase. After analyzing the memos and finding common themes in the gerunds, it seemed that these three categories included all four aspects of power.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Overview of Results

This study desired to know the power dynamics of couples in a relationship when they journey from addiction to sobriety. Power was defined using Knudson-Martin and Mahoney's (2009) characteristics of power: accommodation patterns, relative status, attention to other, and well-being. These aspects of power guided the four grand tour inquiries that were used: "How is influence viewed in your relationship currently?", "Tell me about the attention shared between you and your spouse", "How much do you accommodate for your partner currently?", and "How are each of you taking care of your health now?" Follow-up questions asked about those same characteristics of the relationship but during the timeframe of the addiction. If they admitted to any noticeable shifts from the addiction to currently, the researcher asked when that change was noticed. The transcription was analyzed using Charmaz's (2006) constructive view of grounded theory to achieve the most thorough theory that could be achieved through the research participant.

The Three-Stage Power Shift

This analysis concluded that power shifted in Tom and Susan's relationship in a three stage process that aligned with their journey from addiction to sobriety. The three stages are Drinking Phase, Shifting Phase, and Sobriety Phase, which will be referred to as The Three-Stage Power Shift (Figure 1). For the first category of the Drinking Phase,

there were three subcategories: emotionally isolating, using alcohol to cope, and confronting. The second category, Shifting Phase, also had two subcategories: realizing consequences and asking for help. The final category of the Sobriety Phase had two subcategories: correcting priorities and balancing power. Each of these will be discussed along with some of the gerunds and memos that went along with each theme.

Drinking Phase

This phase was categorized based on the themes that were found in the data during the coding process. By putting their story into chronological order, there were certain themes that could be seen during this drinking phase. These included: emotionally isolating, using alcohol to cope, and confronting. The *emotionally isolating* theme was very interesting from a power perspective. First, the wife admitted that she was “more to myself” when he was drinking because she had tried to convince him to stop to no avail. Prior to the drinking, she would think about accommodating him by going out of her way while running errands to pick up something special for him to eat or drink. This accommodation stopped during his increase in drinking, and she started to focus more on herself after feeling her accommodation for him was unreciprocated and unappreciated. There was little attention shared between them at this point, as well. The wife also shared that she felt her husband was “hiding his emotions” from her during his drinking period. This contributed to him *using alcohol to cope*, which both the wife and husband acknowledged during their interviews. Tom shared that he would drink to have fun and was unsure how to participate in any events with his family without drinking. He said he would drink before going out anywhere, especially if his wife chose the activity they were to do. This seems to touch again on the relative status and accommodation aspects

of power. It did not seem like Tom was eager to participate in activities not of his choosing, and if he felt he had to succumb to those activities, he showed his displeasure by disengaging via alcohol. This led Susan to having to pay more attention to Tom since he would “pass out in a movie theater” or be unable to take care of himself out in public. This led to Susan eventually *confronting* Tom about his drinking, and that would be the only thing discussed between the two of them. Susan felt that everything else she said, Tom would not pay attention to, but she at least had to try convincing him to stop drinking. Tom was not able to be influenced by her or accommodate her during this time. Using in vivo coding, this phase could also be referred to as “griping” by Tom because that was how he felt about Susan asking him to stop drinking for his health and financial reasons.

Shifting Phase

The researcher noted in one of the memos that the shifting period was different for each person. The wife seemed to believe that they moved into the sobriety phase as soon as her husband stopped drinking, but he felt this shift took about six months. The six months gave him enough time for the cravings to subside, and stop “pining for beer” as he said. Organizing the categories this way allowed the “when” and “why” questions to be answered while covering some of the consequential nature of addictions. With these questions being answered, the researcher was able to take a deeper look into the subcategories and theoretical meanings of the process taking place within these categories.

Two processes occurred within the shifting phase: realizing consequences and asking for help. *Realizing consequences* had two major parts that included family and

health. It began with Tom's family, specifically his oldest daughter. She told him a few times that his "breath smelled like beer" and he felt shame for what he was subjecting his daughter to. Then, Tom's health started to deteriorate and he was unable to keep any food down without becoming sick. After a few weeks of him feeling this way, he finally allowed his wife to influence his decision to see a doctor. There he found out about his failing liver and what this could mean if he did not stop drinking. He realized that his drinking was not worth leaving his family or not "seeing my daughter get married." Realizing these consequences led him to the next subcategory, *asking for help*. After realizing the consequences of his continued drinking, he made the decision to stop drinking. He did not change on his own, but enlisted Susan's help. Tom realized that for him to stop drinking, he needed to be open to Susan's influence. He asked her to hold him accountable to sobriety when he was tempted to have a beer, and that is exactly what happened. Susan realized this was when the shift started to happen, because she felt like he was allowing her to have an important role in his life again. He was able to be influenced by her, but they also were moving towards a shared goal of his sobriety.

Sobriety Phase

During this final stage of the process, a common theme that they both agreed on was *correcting of priorities* in their marriage. Before, Tom felt he was prioritizing beer over his wife, his daughters, and his health. During sobriety, after the shift occurred, they both saw these priorities change. He is adamant about his health and staying well for his family, and he stresses that the rest of them prioritize their health as well. Another apparent theme was the *balancing of power* that came during sobriety. It seemed that when Tom reached out for Susan's help, it moved them towards a more healthy power

dynamic. When Tom was “more open” with Susan, as she referred to it, she felt like he was more attentive to her. And in contrast to the Drinking Phase when he was not able to participate in her chosen activities without drinking, during the Sobriety Phase he was able to truly accommodate her by partaking in these things. Not only was he accommodating, but he was being more attentive to her.

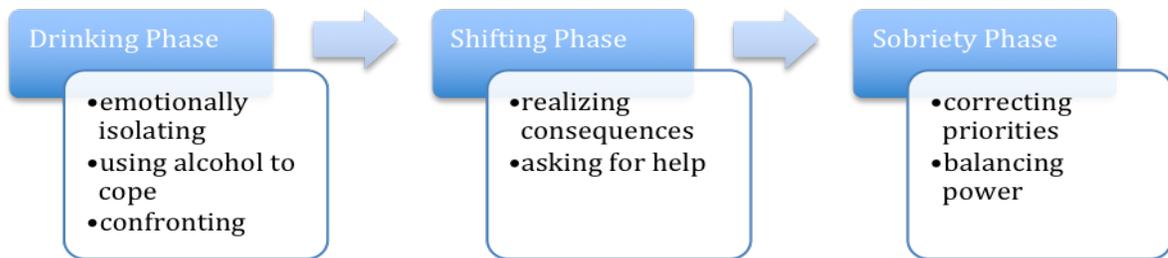


Figure 1. The Three-Stage Power Shift

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Discussion

The results from this study show that there can be a shift in the power balance when a couple goes from addiction to sobriety. According to Knudson-Martin and Mahoney's (2009) definition of power, this couple had certain areas that were definitely imbalanced in the drinking phase of his addiction. This was seen by the lack of emotional sharing, which fits right into the relative status characteristic of power. Susan felt that Tom was not sharing his emotions with her, and instead was using alcohol to cope. This could be viewed as Tom holding more power in the relationship, and not feeling comfortable sharing his emotions with Susan because of his powerful position in the relationship. By not feeling comfortable to express their emotions or feelings with the other person, it created a power imbalance and then led to them feeling more disconnected. This lack of emotional sharing along with the attention that each partner was lacking from the other during this time contributed to the power dynamic. It seemed that this power imbalance led him further into his drinking until his health diagnosis stirred a desire to change in him. The shifting of power started when he was able to ask his wife for help in his road to sobriety, opening himself up to her influence in his life. This decision seemed imperative for both of them to start feeling comfortable enough to be open with each other. Once the alcohol cravings subsided, it seemed this power shift could finally settle into their new power dynamic. This power dynamic shows that they

both share openly, attend to each other, and move towards the same goals of health and connectedness.

Limitations

This grounded theory study was originally designed for 6-8 couples, but only one couple was willing to participate, leaving the researcher to work with limited data. The researcher debated using a different methodology such as case study or narrative, but decided that because grounded theory was the approach used leading up to the data collection, it would make the most sense to continue using grounded theory methods. Saturation was not met for this study, so it is difficult to say how well this process would translate for other couples. The results that this study did provide show a promising future for continued research, though.

Since there was only one couple of only one racial background, the results are limited in how they can be applied to others. Even though the study was well advertised, the researcher misjudged a few key factors to receiving participants to this study. First, even though studying relationships working through addictions is vital to the field of marriage and family therapy, it is difficult to find couples who have survived addictions in their relationship. While this makes it difficult to study that population, it also sheds light on how much of a problem this is for couples. Second, the researcher misjudged how open couples would be to talking about their past addictions. Even though having a small sample size is not ideal for grounded theory methods, there can still be something to gain from using those methods with this couple.

Contribution to Literature

While these results are limited in the ways they can be applied to other couples struggling through addiction, it is still a start to fill a gap in the research that has been neglected. There was little to no prior research regarding power dynamics in couples working through addiction. As systemic thinkers, addictions and power should be viewed as systemic issues with systemic solutions. Addiction is a growing problem in communities, towns, and cities, while power is an issue that is bred into us as humans and fed by the society around us. Both of these issues can affect relationships, but they can also be used to create positive change in systems.

REFERENCES

- American Psychiatric Association, (2013). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (5th ed.). Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric Publishing.
- Bateson, G., (1972). *Steps to an ecology of mind*. New York, NY: Ballantine Books.
- Bepko, C., & Krestan, J. A. (1985). *The responsibility trap: A blueprint for treating the alcoholic family*. New York, NY: Free Press.
- Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Cornelius, T., Desrosiers, A., & Kershaw, T. (2016). Spread of health behaviors in young couples: How relationship power shapes relational influence. *Social Science & Medicine*, *165*, 46-55. doi:10.1016/j.socscimed.2016.07.03
- de Shazer, S. (1988). A requiem for power. *Contemporary Family Therapy*, *10*, 69-76.
- Fiske, S. T. (1993). Controlling other people: The impact of power on stereotyping. *American Psychologist*, *48*(6), 621-628.
- Foucault, M. (1986). *The use of pleasure*. New York, NY: Vintage Books.
- Glaser, B.G. & Strauss, A.L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory*. Chicago, IL: Aldine.
- Gottman, J.M., Coan, J., Carrere, S., & Swanson, C. (1998). Predicting marital happiness and stability from newlywed interactions. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, *60*(1), 5-22.

- Kipnis, D., Schmidt, S., & Wilkinson, I.. (1980). Intraorganizational influence tactics: Explorations in getting one's way. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 65, 440-452. 10.1037/0021-9010.65.4.440.
- Knudson, M. C. (2013). Why power matters: Creating a foundation of mutual support in couple relationships. *Family Process*, 52(1), 5-18.
- Knudson-Martin, C., & Mahoney, A. R. (Eds.). (2009). Couples, gender, and power: Creating change in intimate relationships. New York, NY: Springer.
- Laikind, D. (1991). Who's on top?: Sexism, alcoholism, and systemic therapy with couples. In Bepko, C. (Ed.) *Feminism and Addiction* (147-159). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Lobsinger, C. (1997). Addiction, power, and gender. *A.N.Z.J. Family Therapy*, 18(4), 210-215.
- Loscocco, K., & Walzer, S. (2013). Gender and the culture of heterosexual marriage in the United States. *Journal of Family Theory & Review*, 5(1), 1.
- Meyers, R. J., Miller, W. R., Smith, J. E., & Tonigan, J. S. (2002). A randomized trial of two methods for engaging treatment-refusing drug users through concerned significant others. *Journal of Consulting Clinical Psychology*, 70(5), 1182-11.
- Molden, D., Lucas, G., Finkel, E.J., Kumashiro, M., & Rusbult, C. (2009). Perceived support for promotion-focused and prevention-focused goals: Associations with well-being in unmarried and married couples. *Psychological Science*, 20(1), 787-93.
- National Institute on Drug Addiction (NIDA). (2017). Trends & statistics. Retrieved from <http://www.drugabuse.gov/related-topics/trends-statistics>.

- Parker, L. (2009). Disrupting power and privilege in couples therapy. *Clinical Social Work Journal*, 37 (1), 248-255.
- Rind, B., & Kipnis, D. (1999). Changes in self-perception as a result of successfully persuading others. *Journal of Social Issues*, 55 (1), 141–156.
- Rowe, C. L. (2012). Family therapy for drug abuse: Review and updates 2003–2010. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 38 (1), 59-81.
- Smart, M.J., Brown, A., & Taylor, B.D. (2017). Sex or sexuality? Analyzing the division of labor and travel in gay, lesbian, and straight households. *Travel Behaviour and Society*, 6 (1), 75-82.
- Stanton, M., & Todd, T. C. (1982). Family therapy for drug abuse and addiction. New York, NY: Guilford.
- Steil, J. (1997). *Marital equality: Its relationship to the well-being of husbands and wives*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Steinglass, P., Bennett, L. A., Wolin, S. J., & Reiss, D. (1987). *The alcoholic family*. New York, NY, US: Basic Books.
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2015). Behavioral health trends in the United States: Results from the 2014 national survey on drug use and health (HHS Publication No. SMA 15-4927, NSDUH Series H-50). Retrieved from <http://www.samhsa.gov/data>
- Taylor, S.E. & Brown, J.D. (1988). Illusion and well-being: A social psychological perspective on mental health. *Psychological Bulletin*, 103(2), 193-210.
- Thibaut, N. & Kelley, H. (1959). *The social psychology of groups*. New York: Wiley.

Whisman, M. A., Gilmour, A. L., & Salinger, J. M. (2018). Marital satisfaction and mortality in the United States adult population. *Health Psychology, 37(1)*, 1041-1044.

APPENDIX

Institutional Review Board Approval Letter

ABILENE CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY

Educating Students for Christian Service and Leadership Throughout the World

Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
320 Hardin Administration Building, ACU Box 29103, Abilene, Texas 79699-9103
325-674-2885



September 6, 2018

Carly Brack

Department of Marriage and Family Studies

Abilene Christian University

Dear Carly,

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board, I am pleased to inform you that your project titled "Power Shift Within a Couple's Journey Through Addiction",

was approved by expedited review (Category 7) on 9/6/2018 (IRB # 18-066). Upon completion of this study, please submit the Inactivation Request Form within 30 days of study completion.

If you wish to make any changes to this study, including but not limited to changes in study personnel, number of participants recruited, changes to the consent form or process, and/or changes in overall methodology, please complete the Study Amendment Request Form.

If any problems develop with the study, including any unanticipated events that may change the risk profile of your study or if there were any unapproved changes in your protocol, please inform the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs and the IRB promptly using the Unanticipated Events/Noncompliance Form.

I wish you well with your work.

Sincerely,

Megan Roth

Megan Roth, Ph.D.
Director of Research and Sponsored Programs