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**Power Play - The hidden role of power in our  
lives and relationships  
Transcript**

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## **Power Play:**

### **The hidden role of power in our lives and relationships**

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Good evening ladies and gentlemen, and welcome to Gresham College. My name is Raj Persaud. I'm a consultant psychiatrist at the Bethlem Royal & Maudsley Hospitals in South London, and I am also Gresham Professor for Public Understanding of Psychiatry. I am very pleased that so many of you have come out this evening to hear my talk, which is going to be about the psychology of power. Many of you who regularly attend my talks here at Gresham College will know that I like to remind you that in coming here to Gresham College you are taking part in a tradition that goes back 400 years of free public lectures, something endowed by the wealthy philanthropist Thomas Gresham. My hospital, where I work, is the second oldest public hospital in Britain. It was the Priory of St Bethlem, founded in Bishopsgate, which way back in the 13th Century was in the suburbs of London. Now the hospital has moved to Bromley, where I commute every day through London. My ward is Gresham 1 Ward, so I like the circularity of the connection between these ancient institutions that we are so privileged to have access to here in London.

There is a sense in which, as I'm talking to you today, what is happening is that the power of Thomas Gresham, in making this endowment which has lasted 400 years, is on display. The fact we are all here today is really an example of his power - the power to reach beyond the grave and influence our behaviour four centuries later, which is really quite a phenomenal power if you think about it.

I think power is a very important subject, very important not just in a social/political sense, but in our personal lives. I tend to pick topics to talk about that I think psychologists and psychiatrists have neglected. I do think there has been a neglect of the issue of power within psychology. One theory about this is psychologists and psychiatrists, it is said, tend to be a little bit politically left of centre and therefore they tend to be rather suspicious of power and to believe that power is implicitly a bad thing, so that is why they have tended perhaps not to study it so much. But in fact there is accumulating recent evidence that power at a personal level, and how much power you have in your life, is very important in terms of your overall mental health, your sense of wellbeing, your longevity and your physical health. Although the research studies do not use the word "power" explicitly, they talk about how much control and autonomy you have in your life, and the research evidence is that the more control and autonomy you have in your life, the better your sense of wellbeing will be and the longer you will tend to live. We could interpret that as saying the more personal power you have of your life, is perhaps a good thing, and that is something we are going to be talking a little bit more about later on: having power, and whether the more power you have, is implicitly a good thing or not.

The other reason why perhaps we should be thinking about power as a very important concept in our lives goes back to a point that I made when I talked last year in my lecture about the psychology of motivation, which is the transactional nature of life. The point that I made then is whatever it is that you want in life, whether you want to be a billionaire or win the Gold Medal at the Olympic Games or date Brad Pitt or Michelle Pfeiffer, even if you want to be left completely alone on a desert island, whatever it is you want in life, other people have to give it to you. So one of the central questions in life becomes how do we get other people to give us the stuff that we want, be it attention or love or money. Maybe there is an issue around power; maybe powerful people have the power to get people to give them the stuff that they want, and maybe that is a good thing. Maybe therefore power is very helpful and crucial to our sense of wellbeing.

I want to start unpacking the concept of power with a true story, which happened to me when I was doing a televised 'phone-in once, a while ago. Some of you may know that besides lecturing at Gresham and being a consultant psychiatrist at the Maudsley, I have been occasionally known to make the occasional broadcast on television and radio. Once I was doing a live televised 'phone-in where people ring in with various questions or problems, and I take the phone call and try to give them advice. A woman rang in to say that her husband, who does a lot of business travel - and already, straightaway, alarm bells began to ring in my mind, because the research evidence indicates that if you do a lot of business travel, you are at very high risk for committing adultery, for various reasons, including the fact you have the opportunity. Anyway, she started off by saying her husband does a lot of business travel and he had just returned that morning from yet another trip overseas and had gone straight to work. Being a helpful wife, she thought she would unpack his suitcase for him, and in unpacking the suitcase, she found several packets of condoms. She rang me up because she wanted to know whether I thought he might be having sex outside the marriage. So, playing for time, I asked her whether she had confronted him over the discovery of the condoms in his suitcase, and she said yes, she had rung him at work and told him that she had found these condoms. I said, "What was his reaction?" She said, "Well, he said that he was carrying the condoms for a friend who was too embarrassed to carry condoms,"

and it appeared as though she was giving a fair amount of credence to this story.

Now, what is very interesting to me about this story is that it seems to me that none of us here in this room or the millions of viewers watching on television have ever met her husband, yet we all know he is having sex outside the marriage. She, obviously, has met her husband, she is married to him, she seems him a regular basis, so she is right up close to the problem, and she cannot see it. How come she can't see what is blindingly obvious to the rest of us? Well, I think the answer is because, if it was the case that she could see the implication of the discovery of the condoms, it would have rather nasty consequences that she wants to avoid. One of the consequences, perhaps, might be that she would have to get a divorce, or it would mean that the marriage is really in quite a lot of trouble, and because it is a consequence she does not want to face, or she wants to avoid, it is better for her not to see the implication of the condoms. There is an important point here: before we can see something and perceive it, we have to be able to deal with the consequences. So before someone can see whether someone very close to you is having an extra-marital affair, you have to be able to know what you would do if they were having an extra-marital affair. You have to be able to deal with the consequences.

What is really interesting about this situation is this man, if this woman can't see that he's having an affair because she can't deal with the consequences of this, has actually got quite a lot of power. He can go off and have affairs, and often be rather blatant about it, and he can do this with impunity because his wife cannot even see that it is happening. So there is quite a lot of power here around the notion of consequences and around the notion of belief. So right away, we see a key point about power: power resides in your ability to invoke consequences that other people really desire or they would rather avoid. If this wife wants to avoid the consequence of the husband leaving her, and she really wants to avoid this really badly because she feels she can't cope alone, then immediately this man has a lot of power. So power resides in your ability to invoke consequences that other people really want to avoid or they really desire.

But there is a second part to the power equation, which is your independence from other people, your ability to cope with the consequences they might impose upon you. So, if this man creates an impression that he can cope really rather easily if this wife was to leave him, then he, in a way, still has the balance of power in this situation, because she cannot seem to impose a consequence – let us say that he is oblivious to her getting very annoyed about the affairs. If there is no consequence she can impose upon him that actually he wants to avoid, then we can see the balance of power really is skewed very much in his favour.

Now, notice something very, very important here. It does not matter, in a way, whether she really can cope without him or not. It is her belief about the ability to cope without him or not that really matters. In my clinical experience, I see many marital situations where the couple run into trouble, and the woman is terrified – or it can be the man, very often – of being alone, but decides, or is forced, to live alone and leaves the couple, and then discovers, lo and behold, that actually she copes rather well being single, and when she discovers that of course and she overcomes the previous problem, she gains a lot of power in that situation. It is your belief about consequences, although not just consequences, that are very important. So this man's power is rather precarious in the sense that as soon as she realised or discovered she could survive without him, then his power begins to evaporate.

Let me reiterate the point: power is about consequences, to some extent, and the consequences you can impose upon others that they would rather avoid or they really want, and your own immunity to consequences others can impose upon you. Your independence from others also adds to your power.

Let me straightaway – and I'm going to be doing quite a lot of this throughout this lecture – suggest a Machiavellian tip, a manipulative tip that you might take away to increase and improve your personal power. I want first of all to give a little disclaimer, because I am going to be talking about many manipulations. I am not advocating any of these manipulations! I am not encouraging you to go away and try them at home. I am just alerting you to the fact that they exist, and I am leaving it entirely up to you what you decide to do with them. I don't want anyone to complain later that I turned them into a twisted psychopath as a result of some of these manipulations.

So one way you can obtain a lot of power in a relationship, be it a relationship with a wife or a husband or a boss, is make that other person dependent on you for something very important to them. Start supplying something that they really like and that they cannot get anywhere else, and after they have become very dependent on you for this thing, then you are in a position of great power because now you can withhold this thing that they have become dependent on, and now you can invoke a consequence that they would really rather avoid, and you have a handle on them. You could describe this as a kind of drug addiction model of power, because this is what drug dealers do. They give you a free drug to begin with, and then you are thinking, "This is great. I'm getting all these free drugs," and then all of a sudden, they start withholding the drug, and then you

discover your dependency, you have to start paying them large sums of money, and they have indeed developed a huge amount of power in that situation.

We have talked about consequences as being a key part of power, and let's start with different gradations of power. At the most basic level of consequences, I can pull a gun on you and say you must attend my Gresham lectures otherwise I will blow a hole in you, and I am now using power at the level of compulsion. I am compelling you to attend Gresham lectures and I am invoking a very clear negative consequence if you don't do so. The problem with the compulsion model of power, and this is a model that is very popular with dictators and police states, is that although it can be very effective in the short term, there is a natural psychological consequence, which is that you become rather resentful after a while at me pulling a gun on you. The trouble is that the more resentful you get, after a while, the more rebellious you might get. What is very interesting about compulsion that dictators use, and we'll come back to this point later, is they tend to extend it way beyond the point at which it is helpful to them. Once people start using compulsion, they start using it rather a lot, so the audience, or the people who are being compelling, get very resentful until in the end there is some kind of rebellion, because they really cannot stand any more, the resentment that builds up over a period of time. So eventually, some of you will be willing to take a few hits in order to rebel, storm the stage, and take the gun from me, and liberate yourselves from having to attend Gresham lectures.

The other technique I could use is persuasion. I could run an advertising campaign on the sides of buses here in London. I could run a televised campaign. I could try and persuade you to come to Gresham lectures, and if I persuaded you, there is a sense in which I would be exerting power over you. This is obviously different to compulsion because you are less likely to be resentful about turning up to Gresham lectures if you come here as a result of an advertising campaign. However, notice something very important: it is obvious with the model of persuasion that it is clear that I have persuaded you. You are aware of seeing the advertisement, you are aware of the fact you were not so interested in Gresham lectures before and now you are, and therefore you are aware of what is going on. That is very important, because the best power of all, in terms of the most powerful power of all, is power where you are not aware it is being wielded upon you. There is a problem here, which is when I am using this kind of power, you are aware you are being persuaded, and that means, amongst other things, you can guard against it. You can decide not to be persuaded because you are aware of the persuasion techniques I am using. There is another problem with this technique, which is if you do come to the Gresham lectures as a result of seeing the advertisements on the side of a bus and you discover the Gresham lectures rather boring and unpleasant and tedious, then you are going to be irritated with me for having persuaded you to come. You will displace some of the responsibility for coming upon me, and so that is another problem with that.

Finally, we come to the deepest form of power, perhaps the most powerful form of power, which is manipulation. Manipulation is where I get you to come to the Gresham lectures, but you are not aware of how I got you to do it. So you don't blame me, for example, for your attendance at the Gresham lecture. The fact that it is covert, that I get you to do it without you realising, means you can't guard against it, so you can't fight against it, which is why it's the most powerful technique of all.

So let's talk about a few covert techniques like that. Let me use an example, a favourite example of mine, because, as many of you will know, I'm a fan of classic cars, and I often find myself in this situation. Imagine it is the case that I am a second hand car salesman and you want to buy a car, and I welcome you on to my second hand car sales lot, and we are walking around the sales lot and I am waxing lyrical about the various cars for sale, and I am telling you how great this car is and how great that car is. Now, the problem I have got in selling you a car is you know what I am trying to do. You know I am trying to persuade you to buy a car and, as a result, you know I have a vested interest in selling you a car, and therefore you discount, as the economists would put it, a lot of things that I say. You are sceptical about some of the stuff I am saying. You know that I am a salesman, and you know what I am about, and I have therefore what we call in psychology a credibility problem. You don't trust me. Because I have a credibility problem, I'm going to have difficulty selling you a car, until this happens - you see a car you quite like. You go over to the car and you say, "Tell me about this car. I quite like this car. I might buy this car." I say, "Actually, I would never sell you this car, and I'll tell you why," and I point out a series of faults on the car that you would never have noticed. Lo and behold, you're surprised. I've done something unexpected. You didn't expect me to do this, to actually point out problems in the car that you would never have noticed. I seem to have done something that doesn't appear to be in my interests. I've done the unexpected, I've done something that doesn't appear to be in my interests, and all of a sudden, you're thinking to yourself, "You know, this Raj Persaud, he's different to the usual kind of car salesman. Maybe this is a car salesman I can trust." I will have gained credibility, and then I can sell you a car. It is for this reason that psychologically sophisticated car salesmen always have at least one car on the car lot, the sole purpose of which is to point out faults, which they have no intention of selling to anyone. It's just there so the faults can be pointed out, and that's the point of the pointing out of the faults. What has happened here is I have manipulated you, and you are not even aware that it has happened. That is a classic manipulation

technique, and the reason why it is more powerful than persuasion is because you are not aware of what is going on, and that is power at its most supreme and sublime, some people would say.

Let me suggest another manipulation tactic you may want to try, or you may not, it's entirely up to you. There is a classic situation we find ourselves in, where someone comes and asks us for a favour, and it is a difficult and uncomfortable situation because we don't want to do the favour but saying no is uncomfortable and slightly stressful - you don't want to endanger the relationship - so people often have difficulty saying no in that situation. Let me suggest a manipulation tactic here. You should say no to the favour that is being asked of you, and you should immediately ask that person for them to do you a favour, but it's very important you make sure it is a favour it's very unlikely they are going to be able to accede to, so it's a favour that is tough and difficult, so they are going to say no straightaway as well. Now, you are both even. What has happened here is they asked you to do a favour, you feel a bit guilty about saying no, there is an imbalance now in the relationship because you are feeling guilty; by immediately asking them to do a favour which they are forced now to say no to as well, you have restored balance to the relationship, and therefore it is much easier in that situation for both parties to leave that scenario feeling no one has been hard done by. Of course, in asking them to do a favour, you are pressing home the point to them that saying no is okay. They cannot really object to the fact you said no because now they are saying no and, again, this is a manipulation tactic, because people are not aware of what is going on.

This tactic relies on an important psychological principle, which is that of reciprocity: we like to reciprocate. When someone does something for us, we like to do something back for them. This powerful principle of reciprocity governs a lot of human behaviour. It explains why when people come up to you in the street and they want to beg some money off you, or get you to donate something for a charity, they often give you a small gift first - like a badge or a small flower. In giving you a small gift first, often of very trivial value, they then ask you for a donation in return. The principle of reciprocity is very strong in our psychology, because we like to see ourselves as reasonable, just people, and it means we now feel compelled to give them something because they have given us something first. Therefore, you can deploy this important principle of reciprocity when using manipulative techniques like the one where someone asks you to do a favour and you say no and you immediately ask the person for a favour as well, which they are likely to say no - reciprocity is occurring here, and a natural balance has been restored to the relationship. Manipulation therefore relies on the use of these emotional states that people have whereby you manipulate them.

So for example, going back to the used car salesman situation, you are deploying a manipulation which relies on the fact that we're exhausted with not trusted second hand car salesmen - you have probably been to loads of used car sales lots without much success - and you want to trust. So someone is giving you the opportunity to trust and you have been manipulated into trusting in that situation.

One other example of where you can use reciprocity to your advantage in a manipulative power play, is when you try to persuade someone to change their mind, because that is very difficult - people very rarely change their mind, people are often very fixed in their attitudes. You can deploy the principle of reciprocity. Get into a conversation with that someone, get into a discussion over something where they believe they are persuading you to change your mind on something, perhaps unrelated, and after a bit of a fight, you agree to have your mind changed, and you say, "You know what, you have changed my mind on that. I've got a completely different view now." Then, the principle of reciprocity applies - if you try to persuade them by getting them to change their mind, they will feel a natural obligation to reciprocate by being more open-minded and possibly changing their minds as well. So again, this is another manipulative power technique.

We have talked about the fact that one of the key things about power is when it is wielded against us and we don't know what is going on, so a sense in which deceit is in play at some level. These are when power is at its most powerful because we cannot defend ourselves against it. How can we spot when deceit is going on? It is very important if you are going to improve your personal power to be able to spot when you are being manipulated or you are being lied to. So here again there are some possibilities you might want to think about.

Let us say you suspect your husband has been having an affair, and he says to you, "I was at the cinema with some friends last night watching a movie," but you suspect he was in a hotel room with his secretary, having an affair. How do you find out whether he really was in the cinema watching the film or not? You could grill him on the plot of the film, and this is a standard technique that many people use, but if he is at all sophisticated, he would have read up about the plot of the film, or gone to see it another time, and therefore answer that question. Let me suggest a possible technique. You say to him, casually, "I heard that there was some problem, a car accident or something, just outside the cinema last night, and the traffic was a nightmare. How did you get home? Was there a problem getting home?" Now he has got a problem, right? Let's imagine he

wasn't at the cinema. He doesn't know whether there really was a traffic jam or not. He has got to think this one through carefully. If he says, "Yes, the traffic was a nightmare," then you immediately know there is a problem - he wasn't where he says he was - but he has to think about the fact that if he says, "No, there was no traffic, there was no nightmare," he's not sure what really happened - was there traffic or wasn't there? Here's the point: whatever he says, there will be a hesitation. If he really was at the cinema, there is no hesitation about his answer, because he was really there and he can give an answer. If he hesitates, that gives away the fact that there is something suspicious going on. So that is a useful technique in terms of trying to find out whether people are really telling the truth or not.

Another classic one that some people try and is very useful to think about is this: if you suspect your husband is having an affair, you casually bring up in conversation, "Oh, I heard that so-and-so," you mention someone, someone only tangentially linked to one of you, "is having an affair with his secretary." Now, here is the problem he has: if he is having an affair with his secretary, he has got a problem because you have brought up the subject, and if he changes the subject quickly or seems embarrassed about it, then that is a sign that maybe something is going on that you should be suspicious about. If he appears very interested and wants to find out more and is totally relaxed about it, then perhaps it is the case that he is not having an affair with his secretary.

So again, these are manipulative techniques because, when you are deploying them, the other person does not really know what is going on when you are trying them out, and that is where the power comes from.

If you are going to use manipulation in power, then what is really happening, if you are not going to use compulsion and pull the gun on people, is you are caring what other people think about you, which is why you are going down the more subtle route of manipulation. Manipulators care what people think about them, and people use compulsion and pull the gun on you seem not to care so much what people think about them. Here we have an interesting paradox: do people who use compulsion, dictators - often very cruel dictators, the heads of totalitarian regimes - because they are using compulsion, they are using their army, to force people to do things all the time, and that's the way they exert their power, they often appear not to care what their population thinks about them. And yet - here is the interesting paradox - you always know you are in a country where there is a dictatorship because there are lots of statues everywhere to the head of the country. There are always statues to dictators. If they don't care what people think about them, how come there are so many statues of them all over the place? I want to talk a little bit about where the desire for this kind of complete power that dictators have comes from, because I think it gives us a useful clue about the nature of power.

One possible explanation why you always see statues of dictators whenever you are in a dictatorship lies in their grandiosity, because these people are often very, very grandiose. Hitler said that he was going to finish off what Jesus started. He said that he was the greatest German that had ever lived, and also that he was the greatest German architect that had ever lived, because he liked to design buildings. So he was an incredibly grandiose person, and you'll see this recurrent theme in the way that dictators think about themselves. They have a very inflated view of their abilities and skills.

Saddam Hussein, despite having no military training whatsoever, frequently took charge of the Iraqi army, particularly at the beginning of the Iraq/Iran War, and as a result of his complete lack of experience, often made terrible blunders, and he only gave up control of the army when his commanders-in-chief ganged together and said they were going to refuse to carry on being commanders-in-chief if he didn't hand over power to them. He also had his own imprimatur printed on the bricks of various buildings that he built in a replication of great Persian and Babylonian leaders of the past, so he saw himself as a direct descendent from great leaders of the past.

This grandiosity explains the downfall of dictators, because they over-reach themselves. Hitler, despite the fact that he had conquered successfully a whole series of European countries, planned to conquer Russia, the UK, America and India. The grandiosity led him to overreach himself, and that led to his downfall. We saw the same thing with Saddam Hussein in his attempt to annex Kuwait. That grandiosity meant he overreached himself and led to a downfall.

The other key thing we see with dictators is their paranoia. They are often very paranoid. They are convinced that others are out to take power from them and, as a result, they often retaliate in a very cruel way towards anyone they perceive as being a threat. When there was a 1944 assassination attempt on Hitler, he asked, or insisted, that all eight conspirators were hung by piano wire from meat hooks, which was an excruciating death, and he had it filmed, and his favourite occupation from that point on was watching the film over and over again. So there is something about the incredible cruelty as well of dictators which is interesting to think about in terms of their pursuit of power.

Stalin had one of his most loyal subjects, a chap called Molotov - where "Molotov cocktail" comes from - he went as a Foreign Secretary to the Soviet Union to visit America, and Molotov travelled from Washington to New York by train. Stalin, in a very

paranoid state, got the idea that somehow Molotov had done the journey by car, and he decided that if he travelled by car, it must have been a big, expensive, American car, and therefore he asked himself, "How can Molotov afford a big, expensive American car? He must be being paid by the Americans. He must be in league with the Americans, therefore he is an enemy. I must eliminate him." He plotted to kill Molotov, and in fact Molotov only escaped because Stalin himself died before he could get round to killing Molotov, but he had his wife arrested in the meantime. So very disturbed, paranoid thinking seems to underlie dictator psychology.

Now, you combine that with the grandiosity, and one of the things that you see then happens is the paranoia means that they believe that there are certain people out there, enemies, and for Hitler it was the Jews, are out to get him, and they are out to undermine him and undermine the German state, and therefore the Jews must be eliminated. The other thing about their grandiosity is they believe they are the state. Hitler believed he was Germany. Anything that happened to protect him, enhance him, enhance his life, was actually good for the German state, no matter what sacrifices that involved.

I want to suggest a rather surprising theory about what drives this incessant, relentless, compulsive, paranoid, grandiose search after power, and it is going to be an odd theory, but it is widely shared by many psychologists, which is the theory that dictators and people who pursue power in that compulsive way are actually suffering from an inferiority complex, and they are compensating for their inferiority by this pursuit of power, and that is why these dictators have to have big statues of themselves everywhere, in an attempt to shore up their fragile self-esteem.

To tell you a couple of examples of this from Hitler's own life, Hitler used to love to play bowls, but if he played bowls against someone who was idiotic enough to beat Hitler at bowls, Hitler would immediately stop playing the game and would never continue if he was losing. He could not bear to lose at bowls, even though he was the Fuhrer and the head of Germany. He interviewed 30 people to be his chauffeur, and he picked the shortest man, because Hitler himself was anxious about his height. He surrounded himself with people whom he could look down upon because of their various deformities or deficiencies. For example, he picked Goring - Goring had a heroin addiction. He picked Borman - Borman was an alcoholic; Goebbels had a club foot; Hitler's photographer had a deformed back. He surrounded himself with people that he could look down upon, and maybe this is a clue as to the inferiority complex that he suffered from, and maybe that dictators suffer from, and that explains their pathological pursuit of power.

You may scoff at that, but there is some very interesting research looking at what it is that draws leaders together all round the world, even leaders who are democratically elected, in terms of their common psychological characteristic. There is one theme that seems to emerge over and over again, and it is a theme that is linked to their childhood, which is there is a massive over-representation of leaders - and it doesn't matter how you measure leadership (members of the US Congress, Members of the UK Parliament, Prime Ministers, Presidents, US State Governors) - they tend to be, much more than you would expect by chance, first borns. Why would it be that first borns seem to end up being leaders, more so than second borns or third borns and fourth borns? It is something that has been puzzling psychologists for a long time, and there are various theories that might explain it.

One is that maybe as a first born, you have children who are younger than you and you grow up in that situation, you learn to exercise leadership from an early age, because you have got to look after people younger than you, and because you learn to exercise leadership, maybe you are more comfortable with leadership. The last born is someone who never gets the chance to exercise leadership within the family, and maybe that is why they are very uncomfortable with power or leadership in the long run.

The first born is someone who tends to have a closer relationship with the parents than later borns, because often the first born has spent more time with the parents, had more attention from parents, and maybe they have a more comfortable relationship with authority figures as a result, and therefore they are more comfortable with the whole notion of authority.

But my favourite theory, and it plays back into what it is that drives dictators, is the theory that the key psychological problem for the first born is that when they were born, they were the centre of the parents' attention, there was no one else around, and then a second and third born come along and take away that fantastic parental attention and it gets diverted on to others, and the first born is constantly struggling with that betrayal by the parents and wants to recapture that attention, and that is why they are driven to pursue power. They are trying to come back from being deposed from the throne they were on when they were first born.

We have talked a bit about the psychology of people who pursue power, and is it possible, given what I said earlier about having

more personal power being a good thing, that too much power can be a bad thing? Maybe the drive for too much power actually is a bad thing, and we talked about the pathological narcissism or fragile, low self-esteem or inferiority complex that may explain why dictators pursue power, and we talked a little bit about the psychology of why it is some people might pursue power, even if they pursue it by being elected.

I want to finish now by talking about a very controversial subject, which is the difference between men and women and power, and the way that men and women differ in the way they deploy power or pursue power. Some people would say that men quite clearly tend to pursue power of the more compulsive nature, where they pull a gun on you and compel you to do stuff, and some people say that women tend to pursue power of a more manipulative nature, where they get you to do stuff but you don't realise actually that they are getting you to do stuff – the kind of power behind the throne

What we know about the pursuit of power, particularly if you are thinking about power at the dictatorial level or becoming a leader, is that you have to have a clear, relentless focus, and you have got to stay focused and attending on your target for quite a long period of time. The latest research indicates that there is a very profound gender difference in the ability to maintain focus and concentration, to the extent that one gender clearly is unable to maintain focus and attention at the requisite level, which has led to some psychologists to say that one gender – and I won't reveal which it is yet until – perhaps should not be doing certain professions which require concentration and focus – a very controversial idea indeed.

So what we're going to do is test your focus. I'm going to show you a clip of video. Some of you may have seen this before, because this is an experiment that has been done before, and if you do know the answer, please don't share it with your neighbour. I'm going to show you a clip of video where there's a basketball game being played, and in this basketball game, there are two teams. There's a team wearing a white t-shirt, and there is a team wearing a black t-shirt, and they are throwing a basketball to each other. What I want you to do is play very close attention and count the number of passes of the basketball. Now, here's a slight complication: there are actually two basketballs in play. The team wearing the black t-shirt are throwing a basketball to each other, and the team wearing a white t-shirt are throwing a basketball to each other, so there are two basketballs in play. I only want you to count the number of passes of the basketball that occurs between the team wearing the white t-shirt. The team wearing the black t-shirt, throwing their ball around, that is put in there as a distracter, to see whether you can focus enough just on the team throwing the basketball or the team with the white t-shirt. I want you to count the number of passes, and then I want you to write the number down at the end of the clip straightaway. The clip will only last about 30 seconds or so. Then I am going to come to some of you and ask you what number you got, and we will see a really quite profound and surprising difference between the genders in the ability to count the number of passes. The reason why I want you to write the number down is there's usually a huge amount of controversy after this clip as to what people said the number was, because people are often so, shall we say, going back to some of the points we made earlier, so embarrassed that they got the number wrong, they deny the number that they first came up with. So I want you to write the number down so there can be no controversy about this, because one gender tends to try and pretend they got the number right all along, okay?

Now, in attempt to show a bit of gender solidarity with one gender, I'm going to give you a big, big clue to try and help here, which is that that the problem is that you count the basketball being passed between the team with the white t-shirt, and after a while, without realising it, you start to count the wrong basketball. You start to count the ball being thrown around by the team with black t-shirt, and that is the mistake that people make, which is why they find the final result so difficult to believe. So please focus on the team passing the basketball – the team just wearing the white t-shirt.

Now, one final point, because, as I say, there is always a bit of a fight after this in terms of the result. I need to just define very carefully and rather pedantically what a pass in basketball is! Let me explain something: if you bounce the ball by yourself, that is not a pass, okay? If you throw the ball to another player, that is a pass, or if you bounce the ball to another player, that is a pass. I only want you to count successful passes. Is everyone clear on that before we proceed? So just count the number of passes, and then at the end of the clip, we will check what number you get, so write the number down straightaway.

[Clip plays]

Write the number down now, and I am going to pick on some men and women. What number did you get? 17. I'm going to pick the lady behind you. 17. And pick another lady here – 17. And I am going to pick some blokes now... 17? 15. 16. Okay, right, that is very interesting. This may or may not have worked, but did any of you notice, and some of you will have seen this video before, anything a bit odd that happened in that video that I didn't mention was going to happen? A gorilla walked across the screen! Or, rather, a man in a gorilla suit. How many of you saw a man in a gorilla suit walk across the screen? Put your hands up. There's about 1, 2, 3, 4, 5...6 people saw a man in a gorilla suit walk across the screen. So, you didn't see, the rest



of you, a man in a gorilla suit walk across the screen, look at you, beat his chest with his hands, and walk across the side? You didn't see that? Let's see that clip of video one more time, and let us just see if we can see it again. Don't count the number of passes, just look at the video.

[Clip plays - laughter]

Isn't that amazing? A lot of people refuse to believe that is the same clip of video. Now, I can prove to you that's the same clip of video because 6 of you – can you put your hands up again – saw the gorilla the first time, right, so I'm not making it up. That honestly is the same clip you saw twice. Why is it so many of you did not see the gorilla the first time round?

I need to explain something: this experiment was not about the counting. I made all that stuff up about gender differences and so on, and I asked you to count. The reason why I made all that stuff up, and you should always be very suspicious of psychologists when they set up an experiment – when they tell you what an experiment is about, it very rarely is about that. What I did was I set up a very competitive situation, right, and you guys, I'm afraid to tell you, as a group, are a competitive group of people, and because you were feeling very competitive because I generated a very competitive situation, then you competed hard and you concentrated and really, really focused on trying to get the right number. If I show this clip to the bored adolescents in Camberwell, where the Maudsley is, and who are a group of people who are not at all competitive, and don't care about competition, and don't buy into the competitive situation I set up, they all see the gorilla, because they are not trying to compete with each other in the way that you are. I'm not saying that being competitive is a bad thing, but there are a couple of key lessons about manipulation here, because I manipulated you, and notice something that happened – you didn't see something that was right in front of you, and that is something very powerful. Governments are doing it all the time – they are manipulating us so we do not see something that's right in front of us. How do they do it? I played on an emotional state. I got you fired up to be really competitive, and that's how I did it. The other thing that I did was I got you looking at one thing; I made you care hugely about that one thing in particular and, as a result, you did not care about anything else and so you missed it.

Now, this often happens, that people get very obsessed with the score! I have given talks overseas where people have pursued me to the airport – and even on to the 'plane - saying, "Yes, but what's the correct score?"! That is how competitive some of you are. There is no correct score! We need to let go of this need to have a correct score. The experiment is purely about seeing the fact – and this is a clip set up by Daniel Simons, a psychologist from an American university, exploring a thing called change blindness: how we can be blind to a change that occurs right in front of us.

I want to pick out some of the essential elements of manipulation. I got you focused on one thing, so you didn't see something else; I got you caring a lot about one thing so you didn't see anything else. That is one of the key things that was happening, but I think you should bear this in mind because it has profound implications for the psychology of manipulation.

It also, interestingly enough, has very profound implications for the psychology of eye witness testimony, because when you go into a Post Office and an armed gunman comes in with a sawn-off shotgun and holds the Post Office up, guess what you are focused on? You are focused on the gun. You are not looking at the guy's face. So when the police come along afterwards and say, "Look, you were held up for half an hour by the guy. How come we can't get a correct description from you?" it is because of this kind of situation that is going on, and that is why eye witness testimony has got to be dealt with now, psychologists believe, with a fair amount of scepticism because of this phenomenon that we have seen here.

One of the questions I want to raise is are we living increasingly in a society where we as a population, or an electorate, are increasingly powerless? Increasingly, very sophisticated media techniques are being used against us in terms of manipulating us. One small example I want to give about that was the head of the Secret Service recently gave a talk where she mentioned the fact that the Secret Service were keeping an eye on many, many different terrorist groups and talked about the great threat to Britain of these terrorist groups. Now, one could just take the statement at face value, but one could think about the possibility that there is a manipulation going on here of some description, because one of the things that is happening – and one of the way of detecting whether a manipulation is occurring or you are being manipulated is to think about whether an emotion is being appealed to. Is it the case that the emotion of fear is being appealed to? Is this person giving a talk where they are trying to frighten you? Because if they are trying to frighten you, then one thing that naturally flows from that, when we are frightened, we seek an answer, we seek a rescuer from our frightening situation, and it could well be that the manipulation here is, "I think you should all be very, very frightened because something really, really bad could happen and you are going to need me to protect you from this really bad thing, and I need a lot more resources and funding, and I also need more power in order to protect you. I need power over your civil liberties, and I need power over this, that and the other, and I need to detain you for 90 days, etc. etc. and I need this power in order to protect you." So one needs to think about what is going on here in

terms of a possible manipulation.

One final point is that I think that Thomas Gresham, when he established these free lectures for the public of London, was thinking about the ultimate way in which you as an individual, as an ordinary person, as a person who isn't a dictator, can seize power, and that is to think for yourself. It is the most powerful thing you can do, and I believe that is one of the things that Gresham was trying to do when he established free public lectures for Londoners. So, to conclude with a statement which I'm sure he would have agree with: power to the people!

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