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C O N T E N T S

ABSTRACT

Despite being at a disadvantage in terms of power, women often achieve success in the face of power. To understand the mechanisms underlying the exercise of agency in response to strong power structures, this paper describes power using Foucault's (1982) conceptualisation as a socially constructed, fluid, and ongoing process that is omnipresent even at the grass-root level of human interaction. This notion of power is connected to the viewpoints of the disempowered, arguing that since power is socially constructed, the powerful and the disempowered are likely to view it from different perspectives. Thus there are multiple versions of power depending upon the position of the perceiver. We support this notion using the Standpoint theory (Harding, 1987; 2004). We argue that the perspectives of the disempowered are important to have a more objective account of power relations and understand the mechanisms underlying their responses in the face of power. However, it is argued that most definitions of power in organisational studies are focused on the perspective of the powerful with little or no mention of those upon whom power is being exercised (Salanick & Pfeffer, 1977). The disempowered are then defined using Intersectionality Theory (Crenshaw, 1991), based on the intersection of gender, religion, and class. We present a theoretical analysis of the argument coupled with anecdotal pieces of evidence that support the argument.

"Power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategic situation in a particular society."

—Michel Foucault (1978)

1. INTRODUCTION

Inequality and power differentials have long been the focus of discourse on gender, race and class (Lorde, 1980; Abu-Lughod, 1990). Discussions on gender and race in organisation studies have also observed unsettled accounts of power between men and women (e.g., Grant, 1988; Ragins & Sundstrom, 1989), white and black (e.g., Sonenshein, 1993; Zanoni & Janssens, 2004). These discussions are often focused on the disadvantage faced by groups outside the power structures. Marxist, feminist, and postcolonial literature are rife with narratives of inequality between dominant and marginalised groups. However, even though power is ubiquitous in organisations (Blau, 1964; Flynn, et al. 2011), and issues of race and gender are plenty (Acker, 2006), the definitions of power in organisation studies literature are varied and solely focused on the perspectives of the powerful, with little or no mention of those upon whom power is being exerted (Salancik and Pfeffer, 1977; Krackhardt, 1990).

The uncertainty underlying the definition of power raises several questions regarding the nature of power, the powerful, and the disempowered. What is power? How is power structured in organisations? Who exercises power? Upon whom is power exercised? How is power exercised? How do those on the receiving end respond to power? More specifically, we argue that the definition of power varies upon the perceiver's position in the power structure. These different perceptions become sources of various forms of responses to power. Acker (2006), for example, observes that in both of her studies about race and racial discrimination, white members of the organisation did not see any racial disparity in the organisation, while non-white members saw the inequality regime differently. Using this argument, we posit that while members of privileged groups might take aspects of power for granted, disempowered groups can provide a detailed understanding of those aspects. In line with our argument, we attempt to investigate the research question: "*How do people, who simultaneously belong to multiple marginalised/disempowered groups, from their unique standpoints, perceive power in workplaces and based on their perception of it, how do they respond to it?*" We address this question using the theory of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991) and the standpoint theory (Harding, 1987; 2004).

This paper is divided into six sections. Following the introduction, the second section discusses the concept of power in elaborate detail. It establishes a definition of power that is rather fluid and is sensitive to the standpoint of the beholder. Following this, we discuss the intersectionality theory and explain how it can be used to understand the power dynamics in organisations based on interactions of religion, class, and gender.

The fourth section explains the standpoint theory and justifies its usage as an epistemological lens for studying power in Pakistani organisations. The fifth section uses power, intersectionality, and standpoint concepts to build a theoretical framework underlying the power-related viewpoints and responses of disempowered women in organisations. Anecdotal examples of women in workplaces are used to explain the theoretical framework. Section six concludes the paper.

According to UNDP Gender Inequality Report, Pakistan ranks 121st among 157 nations (UNDP, 2014), representing, among other factors, a low female share of seats in parliament and education, a low female labour force participation rate, and limited prospects for women development. However, despite strong structural constraints for women and their under-representation in power dynamics, there are instances where women in Pakistan have displayed a paradoxical advance in the face of powerlessness (Jacobs, 1996). Women like Malala Yousafzai, Shamshad Akhtar, Roshaneh Zafar, and Mukhataran Mai are exemplars of such advances in different spheres of life (Afzal-Khan, 2015; UNESCAP, 2015; Yousafzai, 2013). But despite the presence of evidence of response, mainstream media and academic literature present women as helpless and oppressed (e.g., Agarwal, 1994; Becket & Macey, 2001; Mery, 2009; Ali, et al. 2011), and there is little, if any, research that addresses the processes that underlie the exercise of agency notwithstanding power.

Addressing this gap, this paper reviews and offers the power-related perspectives of women in organisations, and argues that based on their unique standpoints, women have a different understanding of and approach towards power which is much larger than being helpless and disempowered. We recognise that power relations are not free from chances of resistance (Allen, 2013; Foucault 1979, 1991; McNay, 2013), a resistance which is 'in a disembodied duel with power' (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997: 19). We begin with the argument that power is not a one-dimensional dialectic between the powerful and the powerless. Instead, we argue that through increased individual consciousness, based on a clear perspective of his/her standpoint and multiple identities, it is possible for an individual of a marginalised group to exercise agency and to bring about other dimensions of power into use.

We borrow from organisation studies literature to establish the notion that most of the extant understanding of power in organisations is reflective of power of one group over another (Salanick & Pfeffer, 1977). We then build on the argument, borrowing from the post-structuralism literature (e.g., Coleman, 2015; Foucault, 1977; Hall, 2001) to introduce alternate conceptualisations of power that include the chance of resistance as an inherent tenet of power. We refer to the works of Kabeer (1994) and Rowlands (1977) to explain how marginalised individuals, based on their perspectives of power and their position, can and do exercise agency and resilience to overcome constraints set by structures of power. We support our arguments using anecdotal and organisational instances where Pakistani women have exercised consciousness and have responded individually to power structures or have organised for collective action.

The paper aims to contribute to the organisation studies literature by providing an understanding of power and response towards power from the perspectives of those who have generally remained outside the circles or/and discourses of power. We argue based on Harding's (1991) assertion that these individuals have a unique position of outsider-

within and can view power circles from outside the circles while remaining inside the effects of the power emerging from these circles. We contend that the views of these individuals provide us more objective understandings of power in organisations and can also serve as the basis for understanding the processes that underpin response towards power.

Regarding the nature of power, we consider that power does not have one single objective definition in organisation studies (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1977). There are multiple and often competing definitions of power in literature. Some writers have defined power as the ability to mobilise resources to achieve some goal, without the mention of resistance on the part of those upon whom power is being exerted (e.g., Kanter, 1979; McClelland, 1975; Roberts, 1986). Others define power as the ability to get things done despite resistance or as the ability to outdo the resistance (e.g., Bierstadt, 1950; Emerson, 1963). Common among most of these definitions is that they assume that power is a possession that is implemented over others within familiar confines of state, laws, organisations or class. Nevertheless, this assumption is not entirely unchallenged.

Scholars (e.g., Cornwall, 2004; Gaventa & Cornwall, 2008; Hall, 2001; Lukes, 2005; Pansardi, 2012; Rowlands, 1977; Townley, 1993) have questioned the concept of power as simply 'power over' people and resources and challenged the assumption that power is a possession that is exercised over others. Some scholars (e.g., Brookfield, 2001; Cornwall, 2004) have used Foucault's (1977) focus on bodies as sites of power and his notion of power as fluid, relational, and embedded in struggles over meanings and discourses (Sawicki, 1991; Hekman, 1996). Foucault's (1977) conceptualisation of power stands in contrast with the traditional accounts of power that present formal structures based on dualistic relationships of "power over". For Foucault, power is fluid, relational, and coupled with control over knowledge and discourse. We use Foucault's understanding of power for several reasons. First, as Rowlands (1997) argues, Foucault's conceptualisation of power is relevant to feminist concerns with internalised oppressions and their part in upholding gender inequality. Second, as power in Foucault's terms is understood as socially constructed, it means individuals can and do have different understandings of it, based on 'how' and 'from where' they are viewing it. We attempt to explain the 'how' and 'where' using the feminist standpoint theory (Harding, 1991), and argue that the position or standpoint from where an individual views power is not determined by a single identity, as proposed by the Marxist or the feminist traditions in general. Standpoint theory (Harding, 1991) posits that marginalised individuals have a unique position of an outsider-within; and owing to this unique position, they have significantly different perspectives about power from those inside the power circles. Harding (2004) argues that based on this unique standpoint, marginalised individuals' perspectives of power include several aspects that a perspective coming from a powerful individual might lack or take for granted. We use Crenshaw's (1991) intersectionality theory to argue that the intersection of various dimensions of identity provides individuals with unique standpoints from where they view the power systems with different perspectives.

The following section provides a detailed narrative of why it is useful to view power as a fluid concept rather than a one-dimensional flow of influence from one entity to another.

2. POWER

The concept of power has received much research attention in organisation studies literature; however, most of the conceptualisations of power tend to reduce the concept to operationally definable constructs that might not be valid for understanding power. Some writers have defined power as the ability to get things done in spite of resistance or as the ability to outdo the resistance (Bierstadt, 1950; Emerson, 1963). On the other hand, other writers define power as the ability to mobilise resources to achieve some goal, without mentioning resistance on the part of those upon whom power is being exerted (McClelland, 1975; Kanter, 1979; Roberts, 1986). These definitions assume that power has a positive-sum nature and is not always exerted at the expense of organised opposition. Another strand of definitions describes power as the ability to regulate foundations of actions where power itself is almost unobservable and expressed through control over premises of the actions of others (Bachrach and Baratz, 1962; Lukes, 1974; Mizruchi, 1983). In their paper titled "Who gets power and how they hold onto it: A strategic-contingency model of power", Salancik and Pfeffer (1977) chose to disregard the above-discussed divisions, observing that, while there is considerable equivocality regarding the definition of power, those undergoing the effects of power seem to exhibit an agreement as to who possesses it.

What is power? We attempt to answer this question first using insights from Foucault's (1982) work who conceptualises power as rooted in the daily lives of individuals and the daily activities of groups of individuals. He theorises "a synaptic regime of power, a regime of its exercise within the social body, rather than from above it". Foucault (1980) observes the way power exists in the minutest, seemingly most trivial, human interaction. According to Foucault, power flows around human interactions rather than being positioned at one visibly distinct point. It is incessantly in use, continually being transformed, changed, and challenged by all those entities who exercise it. Hence, he argues that power should be studied as something which flows, or indeed as something which only functions in the form of a chain. Foucault argues that power is implemented and practiced through a net-like organisation where individuals move between the threads of this net. The process of undergoing and exercising this power is therefore conceptualised as being incessant, with individuals not possessing power but moving it. "Individuals are the vehicles of power" (p. 98).

Foucault's conceptualisation of power is important in the context of viewing power from the outsider-within perspective. According to Foucault, within the continuously flowing process of power, individuals are either in the process of exercising power or undergoing it. However, he argues that the ubiquity of power and the circumstance of never being outside the range of power do not imply that those who undergo power are trapped like pawns in a chess game. There always exists a certain obstinacy, an insubordination right at the heart of power relations—power and resistance are thus synchronous. Power always entails the likelihood of resistance; indeed, there is no power without resistance. Resistance remains at the heart of power relations as a permanent condition of their existence and thus both exist as the flip side of one another. Foucault argues that we should investigate the forms of resistance underlying power relations. It could be inferred that resistance is not only critical to power but also offers a reasonable vantage point for the analysis of power relations.

The main point in Foucault's analysis is that power exists everywhere, engraved into the smallest details of every person's daily life, and is exercised continuously by individuals, or the masses, as critical theory would describe them. Here, we see a marked difference between the Marxist view of power as possessed by the dominant elite and exercised upon the masses from above (Brookfiled, 2001). The center for power in the Marxist view is clear and identifiable. For Foucault (1982), power gets entrenched into the very roots of people's lives. It reaches the core of their attitudes and bahaviours, conversations and discourses, and other aspects of their lives. He consequently bases his study of power on understanding it through its expression in practices and interactions.

Foucault's (1980) study of power begins at the grass-root level and involves the lives and thoughts and bahaviours of "ordinary" people and traces it around what he calls a net-like structure of power. He refers to this approach as an ascending analysis of power. This paper uses Foucault's conceptualisation of power for this particular reason. To have a more objective account of the power systems in organisations, it is important to understand the standpoints of the workers who are disempowered owing to intersectionality of multiple identities. Foucault conducts this ascending analysis of power by studying the tiniest mechanisms of interaction between ordinary people. He argues that each of these interaction mechanisms has its own history, course, and processes. These infinitesimal mechanisms, he argues, are then co-opted by more general mechanisms and global forms of domination. This is in contrast with the top-down approach of analysing power that is adopted by the critical theorists, but Foucault believes such top-down analysis of power to be too deterministic as it implies a total control in the hands of the dominant group and refuses any weightage to the agency of the individual.

Another reason for using Foucault's conceptualisation of power in this paper is that most rganisational bahaviour literature refers to power as an objective phenomenon that is comparable and generalisable worldwide. In Foucault's view, power is contextual, and power relations are diverse. They emanate at particular times and places and are unpredictable. Members of dominant groups do not formally organise them to bolster their authority. Instead, they realise that certain practices could be politically useful or economically advantageous in maintaining their dominant position. When members of a dominant group observe that particular practices might be for enhancing or maintaining their domination, they attempt to adopt it and then co-opt it to more general rules of domination. Therefore, according to Foucault, the formation of control mechanisms is somewhat random and unintentional or serendipitous than purposely organised. Individuals and groups who wish to preserve the power relations as they are hold until a certain outline of power relations emerges that can be co-opted for that system to sustain. This accidental configuration is then sustained and integrated to serve goals that are often inconsistent with the configuration's original intent. If we consider Foucault's viewpoint that power is not possessed but exercised and that too at all levels and not just from top to bottom, then it becomes problematic to explain how and why a dominant group maintains its control over the others. We answer it using the intersectionality theory (Crenshaw, 1991).

While critical theory focuses on the marginalisation of the working class by the capitalists, the feminist perspectives argue that gender has been a greater source of

disadvantage for women throughout history. Intersectionality theory attempts to resolve this debate, and within that resolution, Foucault's conceptualisation of power makes the place.

On similar lines, Rowlands (1997) classifies power relations into four categories: *power over* (ability to influence and coerce), *power to* (the ability to organise and challenge existing hierarchies), *power with* (power that comes from organising collective action), and *power within* (power that is inherent in individual consciousness). The concept of 'power within' includes an emphasis on building self-esteem. The process of acquiring 'power within' begins with the individual and entails a change in their perceptions concerning their rights, capacities, and potential. An emphasis on 'power to', on the other hand, has a focus on response and decision making.

The notion of power within is also used by Kabeer (1994), who urges its utilisation in feminist studies to accentuate conscientising women, and building perspective, to help them understand, recognise and thus challenge gender inequality in domestic, organisational and communal settings (pp. 224-229). Kabeer contends that the multidimensional landscape of power needs women to utilise the power within as an essential aide to refining their ability to have agency, to control resources, to define agendas, and to make decisions. (1994: 229).

At the essence of these categorisations of power is the structure versus agency debate that has been at the heart of sociological theory since 1940s (Heugens & Lander, 2009). The term 'structure' includes the social forces (like gender, social class, ethnicity, religion, traditions, customs, etc.) that constrain or influence the prospects that define the actions of individuals. The term 'agency' refers to the ability of individuals to act independently of social structures and to make their own unrestricted choices (Luttrell, et al., 2009). The work of Foucault is mostly placed in the post-structuralist tradition (Burrell, 1988), which attaches importance to human agency. It does not view human behaviour as a product of pure determinism. Conceptualisations formed on the ideas of Foucault (e.g., Rowlands, 1997) tend to admit that power structures are not free from chances of resistance.

3. INTERSECTIONALITY

To understand how those facing a power disadvantage view power and respond to it, the question of what power is about needs to be followed by another equally relevant question – why are some individuals more on the receiving end of power? There has been a long-standing debate regarding the concept of inequality and its social determinants (Davis, 1983; Anderson & Collins 1992; Syed, 2007). While the Marxist perspective has mainly argued for capital as the primary determinant of power distance between the capitalist and the working-class and has advocated that the working class remains to be the most socially disadvantaged in terms of power; the feminist theories argue otherwise (Benschop & Verloo, 2015). Feminist perspectives maintain that women's subordination to men has been the most historically dominant order of the world. The question of who undergoes power and who is disempowered is a question of intersectionality. Individuals possess multiple identities; each one places them at different points in the network of power, from where they move as 'vehicles of power'. This background culminated into an intersectional concept of multi-racial feminism that studies the joint impact of an

individual's membership in multiple groups, and maintains that different characteristics of subordination must be dealt with simultaneously (Syed, 2007).

Feminist theorists of the 1970s and 80s strongly criticised theories that focused on single dimensions of race, class, and gender relations. In her book *Black Feminist Thought*, Patricia Collins (1990) writes that not only that the concepts leading to inequalities (gender, sexuality, race, and class) are closely intertwined, they are also more visible to and perceptible by those people who are disadvantaged on more than one line. Colored women were mainly focused by these theorists. According to these scholars, dominant groups are immersed in their privileged positions and are often unconscious of the unearned advantages they possess. Several feminist pieces of research were conducted, and books were written about marginalised black women from their standpoints (Weber, 1998).

The theory of intersectionality also holds that the expressions that lead to multiple forms of disadvantage often reinforce each other, thus strengthening the systematic oppression (Meyer, 2012). That means that if religious prejudice exists in a society, factors such as social class, gender, and ethnicity will further reinforce the system leading to institutionalised oppression of religious minorities. However, it is important to consider is that the powerfulness and powerlessness of a group are not necessarily related to numeric strength. A demographic minority may also be privileged by virtue of their class, status, or other characteristics, as in the case of White British-American Protestants in North America (Glassman, et al. 2004) and Najdis of Saudi Arabia (Ibrahim, 2006).

The "multidimensional conceptualisations" increase the complexities of intersectional research. (Brown & Mirsa, 2007) In her study, Crenshaw (1991) has formulated three ways of researching intersectionality: structural, political, and representational.

3.1. Structural Intersectionality ectionality considers the distinct experiences women of different backgrounds have within the same social and political systems. Crenshaw (1991) argues that services aimed at helping women with problems such as rape or battering should not be generalised for all women. Keeping in view the differences between black and white women, it has been purported by Crenshaw (1991) that if services are not directed to a specific group and do not consider all aspects such as race, class, or linguistic status, they will be of inadequate help to marginalised women. For example, a black woman from the lowest social class who faces linguistic, literacy, or mobility barriers may not be able to report a case against sexual or domestic violence. Simply, societies are not just sexist; there are also divides based on class, race, language, ethnicity, and other characteristics. The methods of study should, therefore, specifically target each group with reference to its unique features and contextual realities (Crenshaw, 1991).

3.2. Political Intersectionality according to Crenshaw (1991), women of color (or women with multiple forms of discrimination) fall into more than one political group. If these political groups conflict with each other, it will negatively affect the overall political needs of oppressed women. For example, the problems of black women related to patriarchy and racism will intensify when Women Studies fails to address racism issues, and anti-racism fails to address feminist agendas.

Similarly, suppose women of a specific group are marginalised on the grounds of socio-economic status and religion in a society. In that case, the conflicting interests of feminism, capitalism, and religio-politics will add to her struggle against oppression and make the course of research more complex.

3.3. Representational Intersectionality emphasises how women are represented in media and the popular culture. In her study, Crenshaw (1991) discusses how Western culture portrays women of color are demeaning; such insulting representations create further challenges for marginalised women in combatting discrimination and violence.

The different conceptions of power have been implicitly based on the notion of identity, Crenshaw (1991) argues. She maintains that most mainstream liberal discourse considers gender, race, faith and other categories of identity as vestiges of domination. While most of these identity perspectives imply delineating differences, they fail to do so. The identity politics perspective does not transcend different in that it disregards intragroup differences. Ignoring these intragroup differences can result in tensions within groups. Crenshaw (2004) argues that feminist efforts to investigate women's experiences and the antiracist attempts to study the experiences of people of color have been going on in silos and have proceeded as though these experiences and issues are mutually exclusive. An intersection of racism and sexism is common in the lives of real people; however, they rarely intersect in feminist and antiracist theories and practices. When a man of color advocates for the rights of people of color, they represent both men and women of color, thus treating their issues as though they are alike. Likewise, when a white woman speaks for women's rights, she assumes as though the disempowerment that a white woman faces is comparable to a black woman faces.

The idea of multiracial feminism is based on the notion that the synchronicity of different practices of discrimination results in several disadvantages for individuals who belong multiple disempowered social structures (Syed, 2007; Syed & Ali, 2011). Together, gender, race, and faith build a specific location in a social system and none of these systems.

Critical race theory also supports this perspective (Syed, 2007). It argues that racial discrimination is not a marginal factor that can be explained as individual experiences, it is widespread and stable (Russell, 1992). Using the notions of the critical race theory, Crenshaw's (1991) proposition is based on the idea that it is important to examine the intersection of race with other forms of subordination like class and gender. Her main argument is that women as members of one group may experience different biases from their male counterparts; however, since each woman is a part of multiple groups, these memberships interact in a complex manner to result into a form of disadvantage that is larger than sum of the disadvantages coming from each group. Spelman (1998) elaborates this notion saying that being a woman can cause a subject to face several forms of disadvantage or oppression; however, what form of disadvantage it would be, would be determined by her membership in other groups—it would depend on "what kind of woman she is." Thus, she argues that it cannot be the case that a woman's disadvantage has to do solely with her gender and not with her race or social class.

Benschop and Verloo (2015) observe that despite the 'success' of feminist theories, the literature in organisation studies is yet to absorb the concept of gender as a mainstream variable. The gender concerns are rather ghettoised into one chapter on

gender in every textbook on management or organisational bahaviour, while the mainstream theories exist without incorporating gender. This holds true for the intersectionality of gender with other forms of subordination, especially race. Syed (2007) observes that the question of women of ethnic minorities is largely ignored in organisational contexts. Ethnic minorities comprise a large percentage of the global workforce, and even from a pure functionalist perspective, it is an important but largely ignored construct. Consequently, issues faced by ethnic minority women are even more complex, and yet ignored in most contexts.

In the Western context, it is argued that although almost every individual faces several intersections of attributes, the most significant is the intersection of race and gender (Brewer, et al. 2012). It is noted that ethnic minority women are more probable to experience the default biases inside apparently impartial legal and employment structures (Young, 2002). We agree that due to the combined influence of multiple stratification schemes, the standpoints of women of minority groups are most likely to be filtered out of the mainstream discourse. However, our definition of minority is slightly different from that coming from critical race theory. We argue that while the concept of racial discrimination against people of color has been a globally recognised matter of importance, there is a much more pressing concern that the eastern part of the world is now facing. Here, especially in Pakistan, the dominions of power are shaped more by religion than by race, as a new wave of Saudi-like exceptionalism is becoming more and more rampant in this part of the world (Lakoff, 2004). Thus, we look at intersectionality in a somewhat different manner. We look at it as an interaction between gender, class, and religion.

Some authors argue that in the post-colonial context, the stratification of cultural relations was reinforced by industrial/corporate structures and was reflected in a gendered and 'Western' lifestyle (Mosse, 1993). Subramanian (2015) also presents a similar case in India where the post-colonial period was followed by a translation of the predominant caste-system into a more merit-based knowledge-intensive system; however, the concept of merit remained an elite virtue, in a capitalistic fashion. Subramanian's and many other similar notions imply a certain deterministic pattern of power begets more power. Our conceptualisation in this paper is different, if not more complex, than a deterministic view of power relations. We are looking at power as a moving phenomenon that individuals experience differently based on their standpoints, which in turn are formed by intersections of multiple identities.

4. STANDPOINT

Our epistemological stance in this research is interpretative in that we do not look at power as an objective concept. People's views about power differ according to their perspectives, and thus we use the standpoint theory to explain why this research uses the viewpoints of the disempowered. The standpoint theory suggests that an individual's perceptions are shaped by his/her own unique experiences and interactions within the social group of which s/he is a member of (Rollin, 2009). The theory, therefore particularly focuses on the authority and objectivity of the knowledge that people can engender about their own selves, opinions and the ways these opinions have been formed (Harding, 1987). A standpoint, hence, is the unique position from which an individual views the world (Griffin, 2009).

Standpoint theory argues that the perceptions and/or opinions of the disempowered can help generate more objective accounts of the power systems (Allen, 1996). This is referred to as "Strong Objectivity". Collins (1998) postulates that the disempowered individuals have a unique position of "outsider-within" in social groups. They are able to indicate patterns of bahaviour that members of dominant groups are engrossed in and are thus unable to distinguish. Standpoint scholars have also argued that disempowered individuals do not have their stakes involved in maintaining the status quo therefore, it is more likely that they will come up with more objective narratives (Collins, 1990).

In her study "*A Conceptual Framework for Understanding Race, Class, Gender and Sexuality,*" Lynn Weber (1998) has identified six common themes in the contemporary studies of race, class, gender, and sexuality. We argue that these themes apply equally to the religious minority women of lower socio-economic classes in Pakistan. These themes are summarised as follows:

(i) Race, class, gender, and sexuality are **contextual** (Weber, 1998, p. 16). These are not universal and static concepts and are subject to continuous change. Weber maintains that the meanings of these concepts undergo constant changes across time, regions, and groups. Researchers, therefore, cannot identify universal meanings for all peoples at all times and locations; the historical and global context should be taken into account while studying any group.

(ii) The concepts are **socially constructed** through group interactions and are not determined by biology (Weber, 1998, p. 18). Weber notes that the meanings of these concepts cannot be completely understood through traditional quantitative methods where people are treated as only one variable or category that is mutually exclusive with the other. The biological and social facts of individuals are deeply rooted in social and cultural norms and are interrelated. Today, social scientists treat biological relationships as a much more complex phenomenon than in the past.

(iii) There are **systems of power relationships** in societies that lead to hierarchies and domination of one or more groups over other(s) (Weber, 1998, p. 20). So race, class, and gender are also power relations through which certain groups are disadvantaged, and some are more privileged. According to Weber, these systems of relationship define who will be dominant over whom and who will be subordinated by whom. Dominant groups have more control over resources, and they take measures to maintain power in social relations.

(iv) Race, class, and gender are manifested **at social structural (macro) and social psychological (macro)** levels of individuals' lives (Weber, 1998, p.21). The individual manifestations of oppression are usually more visible than the structural ones.

(v) Inequalities are **simultaneously expressed** in all social situations at individual and societal levels (Weber, 1998, p. 24). This also means that not anyone is an absolute oppressor or oppressed. Each oppressed individual occupies a dominant position at a certain level within the intricate sets of social hierarchies.

(vi) The scholars of race, class, and gender have accentuated the **interdependence of knowledge and activism** (Weber, 1998, p. 25). Weber argues that thorough

understanding of these concepts can lead to effective empowerment of the oppressed people by challenging the status quo and seeking justice and equality.

A number of factors are involved in shaping the standpoint of an individual, including his/her physical and social/cultural environment. Factors such as spatial proximity and cultural similarities may form similar standpoints for various individuals; however, the end standpoint is narrowed down to an individual (Rollin, 2009). For example, if we look at working women of religious-minorities in Pakistani context, their standpoints may be similar in terms of religion, nationalism, or gender roles; however, if their socio-economic status is dissimilar, their standpoints are not exactly similar.

Not only may one's standpoint vary from others due to differences in situations, but standpoints may also change with changes in status and situations. Clarity and obscurity of concepts for individuals depend on their respective standpoints. It is also important to note that the more people share common backgrounds and traits, the more likely there are to have similar standpoints.

At the heart of standpoint theory lie the feminine perspectives and viewpoints and the ways in which they are shaped. Standpoint theory also focuses on how women interact with each other and with others as a result of their standpoints (Harding, 1987). Standpoint theory supports the feminist notion of "strong objectivity" which proposes that the perceptions and/or opinions of marginalised and/or oppressed people can help to generate more objective accounts of the cultures and societies (Allen, 1996).

The following section attempts to build a theoretical framework based on the arguments from sections two, three and four. We are combining a fluid conceptualisation of power with the concept of disempowerment from intersectionality theory and borrowing an epistemological lens from standpoint theory. We illustrate some anecdotal examples of women's responses to power in work settings to explain our theoretical framework. The following section also contains a comparative analysis of a mainstream view of power and a standpoint perspective of power.

5. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Our argument revolves around a fluid conceptualisation of power that holds an inherent possibility for individual or collective action to challenge existing power hierarchies through individual consciousness or as Rowland (1977) calls it 'power within'. In terms of power relations, 'power within' signifies improved individual consciousness and awareness. From an agency viewpoint, it denotes increased self-assurance and awareness of opportunities and rights, extended ambitions and capability to convert ambition into action, and from a structure transformation viewpoint, it discusses the changes in attitudes and stereotypes and commitment to change (Luttrell, et al. 2009). In our view, the power within is formed through recognising intersectionalities and standpoints, and through incorporating multiple socially defined perspectives of power. Table 5.1 provides a comparison of a traditional view of power and a standpoint perspective of power. As Salanick and Pfeffer (1977) observed, there is a great deal of variation in the traditional definitions of power; there is a fair amount of agreement over the direction in which power is exercised. There is no account of the perspectives of those who do not possess power or are at the receiving end. However, the standpoint

perspective includes a socially constructed view of power, which inherently takes into account the possibility of intersectionality. The standpoint perspective is that members of marginalised groups have a different view of power based on their position outside the power structure. On similar lines, an individual with multiple marginalised identities has their unique standpoint. Standpoint perspective's claim of unique standpoints is in itself acceptance of the idea that individuals may and do belong to more than one group/identity. These multiple identities enable each individual to have a unique standpoint. For example, women may have different views of power from men, but women of lower socio-economic classes may have a unique perspective from their other female counterparts. Studies show that while white males are paid higher and are more likely to be promoted than employees from other identity groups, white females still have better chances for promotion and higher pay than black females (e.g., Acker, 2006). Thus we posit that our standpoint perspective is inherently intersectional and different from the traditional perspectives on power.

Table 5.1

The traditional view of power in organisation studies literature	A standpoint/intersectional perspective of power
Ability to get things done in spite of resistance or as the ability to outdo the resistance (Bierstadt, 1950; Emerson, 1963).	The disempowered individuals have a unique position of "outsider-within" in social groups, and they are able to indicate patterns of bahaviour that members of dominant groups are engrossed into and are thus unable to distinguish (Collins, 1998).
Ability to mobilise resources to achieve some goal, without the mention of resistance on part of those upon whom power is being exerted (McClelland, 1975; Kanter, 1979; Roberts, 1986).	Perceptions and/or opinions of the disempowered can help generate more objective accounts of the power systems (Allen, 1996). This is referred to as "Strong Objectivity."
Ability to regulate foundations of actions where power itself is almost unobservable and expressed through control over premises of the actions of others (Bachrach and Baratz, 1962; Lukes, 1974; Mizruchi, 1983).	The disempowered individuals do not have their stakes involved in maintaining the status quo therefore, it is more likely that they will come up with more objective narratives (Collins, 1990).

There are many examples of responses to power, which are sourced by the disempowered individuals' understanding of power. One such example is Shamim Akhtar, a 53-year-old woman from Rawalpindi, a truck driver by profession (*The Express Tribune*, 2015). In a media interview, Shamim discusses the odds that she faced before she decided to enter a profession that had always been associated with men. However, being the sole breadwinner and having a starving family, she calculated her way into the profession. "*I knew how to drive, and unlike many of the truck drivers, I had a license.*" She narrates her account of appearing for a test-drive and clearing it, earning awkward

glances. She made her way into the profession by someway changing the dynamics of work with a more domestic-like setting. In the same interview, a male colleague says that Shamim treats male drivers like her sons, and they respect her as their mother. Shamim's story is an exemplar of power-within, revealing how she conceptualised her position as a mother-figure in an otherwise male-dominated setting and built on it to break stereotypes. In the interview, Shamim enjoys casual chats with her colleagues and greets them with casual hugs just as they would greet each other.

In another story published by Care International as a part of their Human Development Story project (Mohsin, 2014), a Hindu woman named Agri reveals her account of how she faced multiple challenges after the death of her husband. Her in-laws asked her to leave the house, and her own family did not take her back. She was not allowed to work as working women were looked down upon, but Agri had no choice but to look for sustainable income as a young widow with seven minor children. She was the first woman to register with the Community Infrastructure Improvement Program (CIIP), a Care International Project in Pakistan. As a part of her training, Agri was involved in road construction, a strictly male-dominated job. Half of her income from road construction was saved as she simultaneously received basic business skills training. At the time of the story, Agri was a community leader, a successful businesswoman, and an important figure in her and her husband's family. This story is an example of intersectional disempowerment in that the subject was a woman belonging to a minority religion and lower socio-economic strata. In a setting where gender stereotypes do not allow her to reveal her face without a veil, Agri blocked out all social expectations and gender stereotypes to earn bread for herself and her children.

Another example of women's resourcefulness and the agency is Roshaneh Zafar, the Founder and Managing Director of Kashf Foundation, Pakistan's first specialised microfinance institution, which was created to alleviate poverty by providing a suite of affordable financial and non-financial services to low-income households, especially women. Ms. Zafar started her career with the World Bank and then went on to set up Kashf Foundation. She has won many awards and recognitions for her contributions to the field of social entrepreneurship and women's development (KF, 2016).

Another example of an alternative view of power is Veeru Kohli's. Born to a landless tenant farmer, Veeru was married off to another tenant, who was bonded in labour to a landlord. While the landlord's narrative might be a different view altogether, Veeru's account is one of violation and exploitation (*Dawn*, 2014). Unlike other bonded workers, she did not find virtue in serving the *Master* and decided to end her misery. In her narrative, she says, "*I knew it was hard, but I also knew that only I could help myself.*" She ran away from captivity, and while she was forced to go back to the landlord, she remained adamant. "*The SHO[1]tortured me for two days and told me to return to the landlord. I told him that I would not even if he killed me. They finally let me go.*" (BBC Urdu, 2017). Her view of power is different from that of the powerful. She sees it as exploitative, and because of her ability to cognize power, she found a way to respond to it. Since her release, Kohli has freed over 400 bonded workers and is now planning to participate in the upcoming elections for the local assembly.

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[1]Station House Officer (Police).

Moeen Begum, another woman, hailing from an orthodox background in Parachinar, narrates her account of how she ended up being a doctor and an esteemed member of the tribal *Jirga*[2] (BBC Urdu, 2017a). When she was admitted to a medical college, her father received all kinds of threats from the members of his tribes because it was considered inauspicious to let women work among men. Despite social pressure and threats, Moeen begum continued her quest, finished her medicine education, and became a doctor. She says, "these tribal people respect you in return for your service." Like the other women in our examples, Moeen Begum's perceptive provides an alternate view of the strong power structures and her unique solution to break free from them.

In their study of Pakistani women's struggle and resistance to violence, Critelli and Willett (2013) present interviews with activists who founded a legal aid practice to defending women's rights and a private shelter for women fleeing from abuse. The study suggests that women's movement in Pakistan continues to negotiate women's interests with the state and society and has become increasingly effective. Critelli and Willett (2013) report that these women's organisations have been highly visible and active in mobilising, even during repressive regimes, with active campaigns and strategic use of cultural resources to amplify the debates and create awareness.

6. CONCLUSION

Using examples and the literature, this paper is an attempt to establish that the disempowered members of workplaces are also parts of power networks and that their conceptualisations of power are different from that of the powerful and this is what allows them to understand power differently and therefore to respond to it. As observed in Table 5.1, when we define power in organisational studies literature, there is little mention of those at the receiving end of power. Implications from the research may inform conceptualisations of hierarchical power in other social sciences as well.

While we engage with some anecdotal cases as potential exemplars, the theoretical model proposed in this research calls for in-depth empirical investigation in different contexts. Future research may investigate how the disempowered view, define, and experience power from their vantage points and how such conceptualisations can be fruitful to our understanding of power in organisations.

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[2]A *Jirga* is a traditional assembly of tribal leaders that make decisions by consensus and according to social norms.

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