

Power in Dialogical Interactions

Ben Ong

19 May 2023

6th International Conference in Dialogical Practices

Olomouc

ben.ong@monash.edu

Acknowledgements

- Eleftheria Tseliou – University of Thessaly
- Tom Strong – University of Calgary
- Niels Buus – Monash University

Ong, B., Tseliou, E., Strong, T., & Buus, N. (2023). Power and dialogue: A review of discursive research. *Family Process, advance online publication*, 1-17.

[doi:https://doi.org/10.1111/famp.12881](https://doi.org/10.1111/famp.12881)

Outline

- Power in family therapy and dialogical practices
- Theories of power
- Discursive research

- Research findings

Small Groups

- What do you think of when you hear the word “power”?

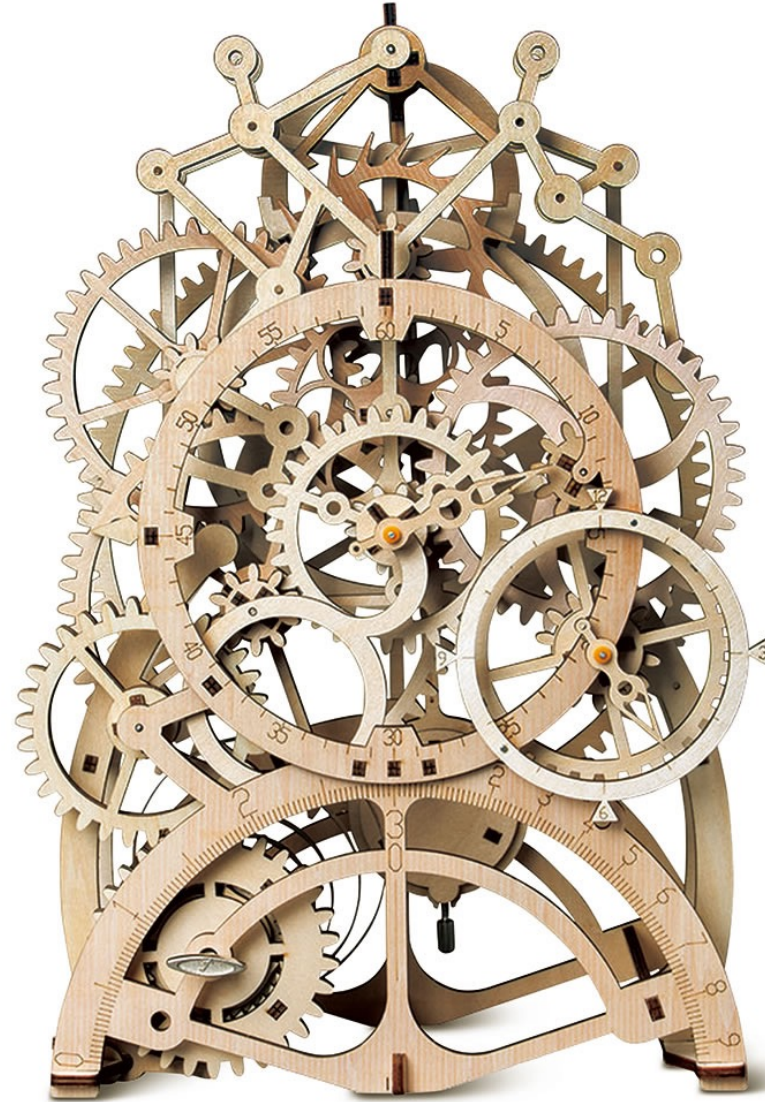
Power in Family Therapy

Cybernetics

- Circular causation & feedback loops
- Power as a linear relationship

Critiques

- Violence and abuse
- Social factors
- Therapist power



A reaction...

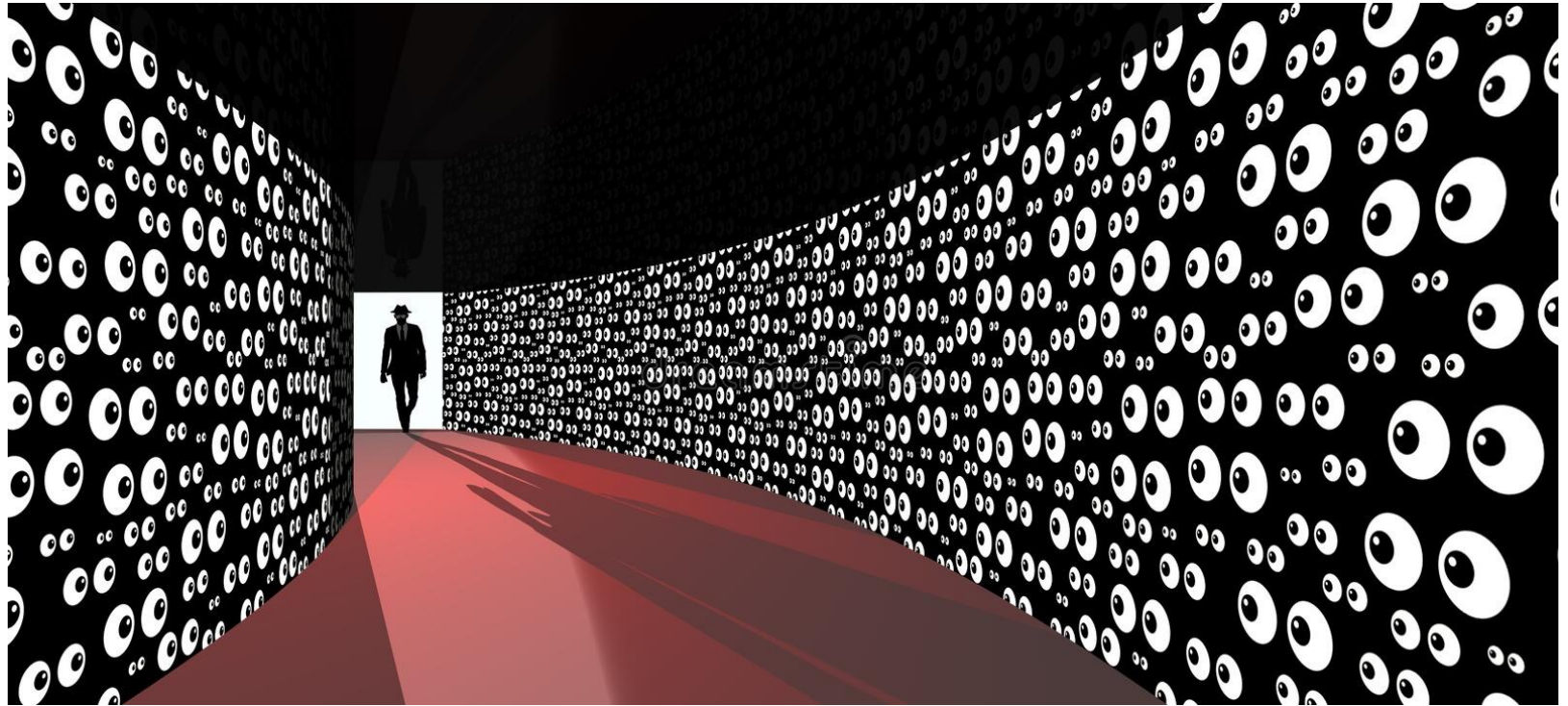
- Power to be avoided
- Equalising of power
- Collaboration
- Empowerment?

Collaborative-Dialogical Approaches

- Polyphony
 - “Client is the expert”
 - “Not-knowing”
 - Participant-manager
 - Architect of dialogue
-
- Dialogue and power - Guilfoyle

Foucault on Power

- Not only power over another
- Power/knowledge
- Distributed
- Self-regulation
- Positive force



Social Power

Turner (2005)

- Coercion
- Persuasion

- Authority

Small Groups

- How does this fit with your ideas about family therapy?
- What do you think of these ideas about power?
- How does this fit with your ideas about dialogical practices?

Discursive Research

- Ethnomethodology
- Conversation analysis
- Discursive psychology
- Talk a vehicle for social actions

Authority

- Epistemic
- Deontic

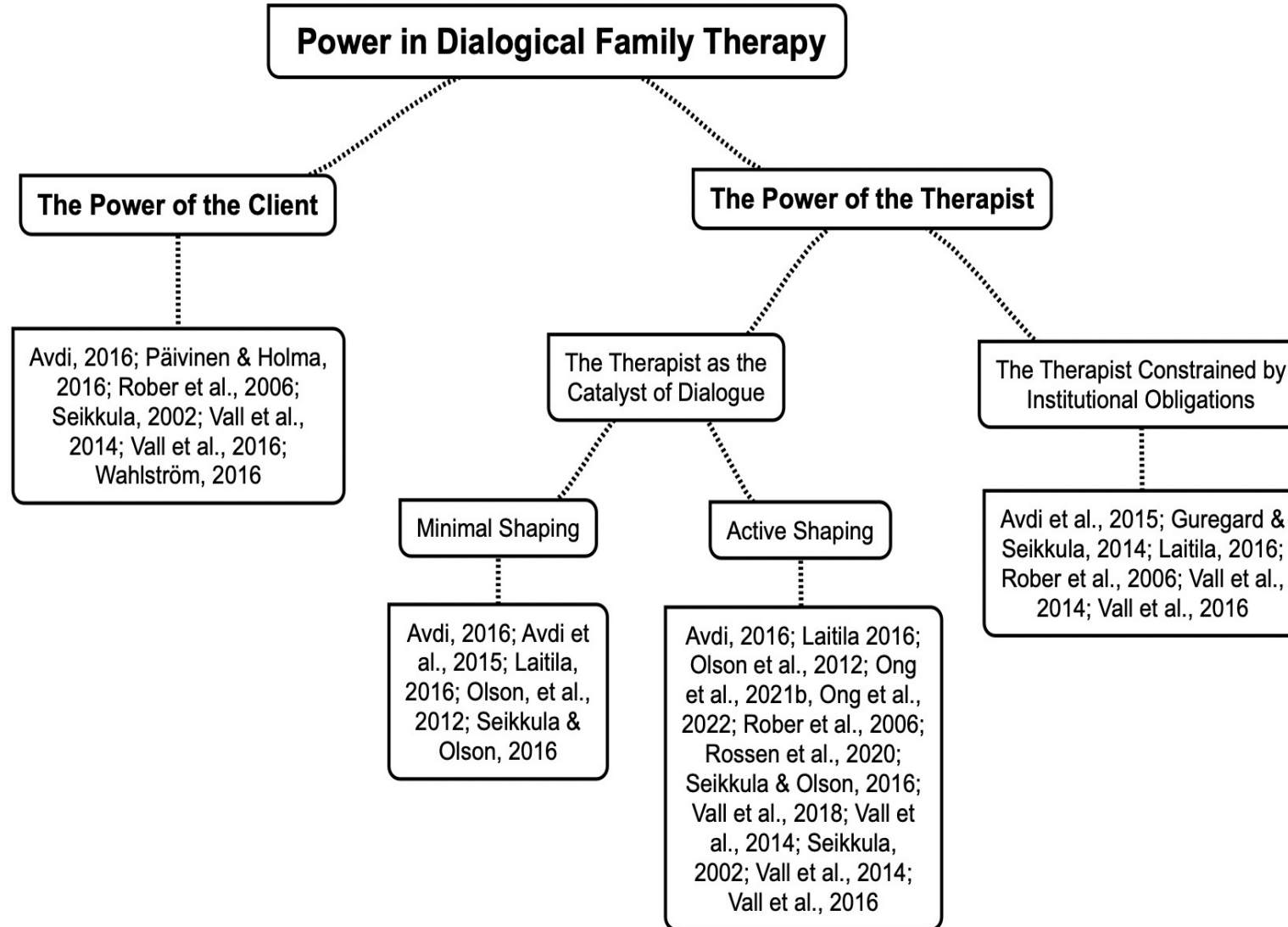
Method

- Literature review
- Search: open dialogue, dialogical, power, deontic*, authority
- Inclusion criteria: empirical studies, real-life psychotherapy using dialogical approach, individual/couple/family therapy, some form of discursive analysis

- 18 articles for review
- Extracts from analysis and discussion related to power
 - Differences in knowledge or influence

Findings

Summary of Themes and Supporting References



The Power of the Client

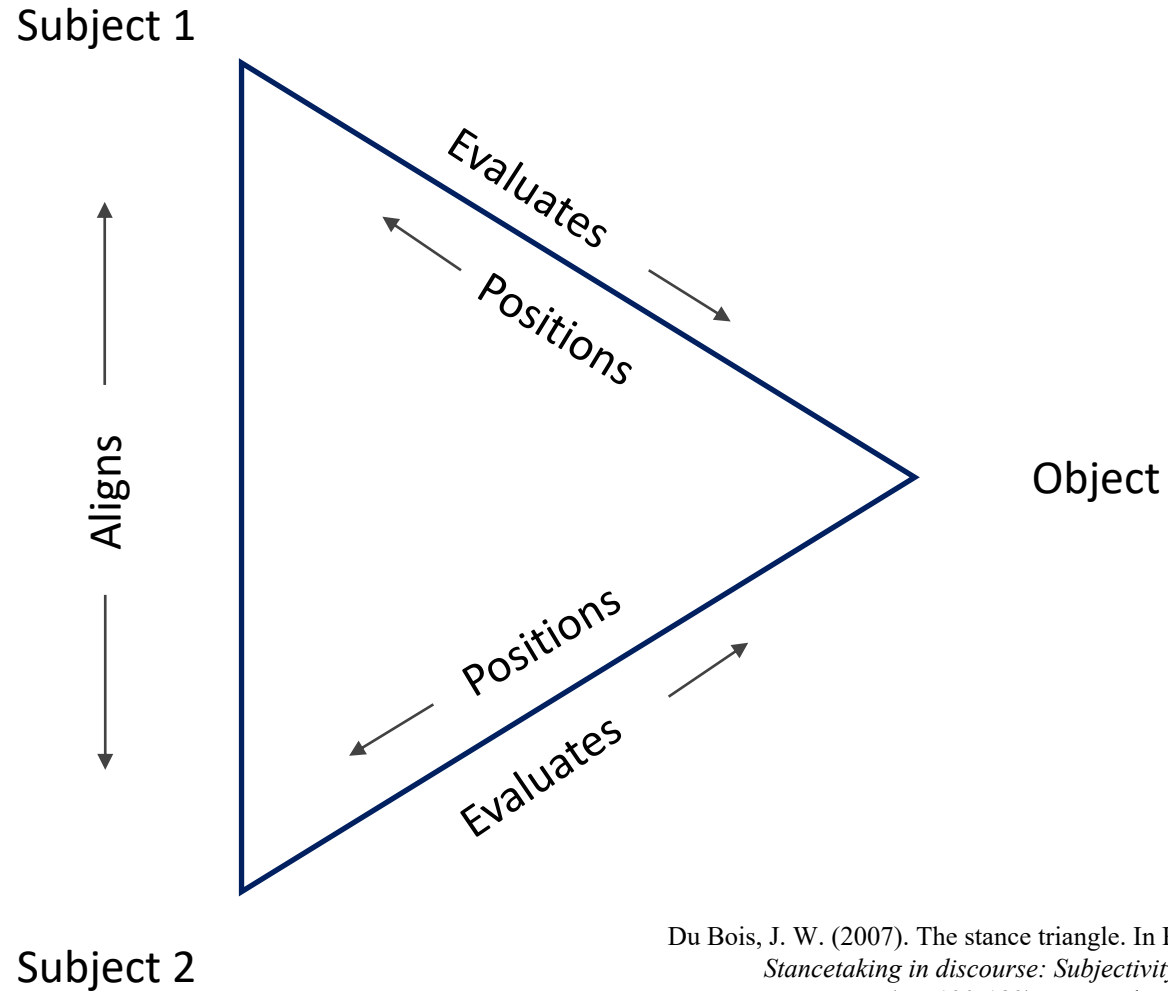
- **Blame**
 - Reference to a normative moral order
 - Dominant discourses about relationships
- **Structural**
 - Introducing topics
 - Speaking time
 - Accept/reject therapist formulations
- **Conferred, promoted, allowed by therapists**

The Power of the Therapist

Therapist as the catalyst of dialogue

- Minimal shaping
 - Promotes dialogue
 - Constructs agency
- Active shaping
 - Questions – “what are your thoughts about...?”
 - Reflections – epistemic downgrades
 - Speaker and topic selection – “Y what do you think of X?”

Stance



Du Bois, J. W. (2007). The stance triangle. In R. Englebretson (Ed.), *Stancetaking in discourse: Subjectivity, evaluation, interaction* (pp. 139-182). Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

The Power of the Therapist

The therapist constrained by institutional obligations

- Psychiatric assessment – monological, reduced agency to decide topics
- Promoting safety around violence – managing interaction minimize power game
- Psychotherapy discourses
 - Talking about emotions
 - Reinforcing positive changes through reformulations

Conclusions

Summary

- Emphasis on therapist
- Therapists exercise power through managing the session
- Therapists downgrade claims about knowledge/epistemics/formulations
- Power is present and maybe necessary for dialogical interactions
- How should therapists deal with difference and what moral position do they adopt?

Challenges

- Power between network members?
- Children?
- Race, gender, experience...
- 2 practitioners

Small Groups

- How do these findings fit with your experiences of dialogical practices?
- What do you agree or disagree with?
- What do you think is missing in this description of power?

- Who has rights to knowledge?
- Who has rights to direct the conversation?