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Chapter Title:

Hobbes on power and gender relations

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Abstract:

In this paper, I articulate two Hobbesian models of interpersonal power relations that can be used to understand gender relations in society: what I will call the dominion model and the deference model. The dominion model discerns vertical subjection to another's will, whereas by contrast the deference model places individuals in a complex and shifting webs of favor and disfavor.

Hobbes himself analyses gender relations through the dominion model. Indeed, more broadly this is the most prominent model of interpersonal power relations throughout his texts. It is this model which is also reflected in the very rich existing feminist literature on Hobbes. However, the deference model, emerging only late in Hobbes's oeuvre, offers a superior general rubric for understanding interpersonal power relations. In particular, in light of its ability to grasp informal and diffuse relations of power, I argue that it offers useful insights for thinking about gender relations in our post-coverture era.

Keywords:

Hobbes; power; gender relations; Pateman; interpersonal power relations; dominion; deference

Introduction

In this paper, I articulate two Hobbesian models of interpersonal power relations that can be used to understand gender relations: what I will call the dominion model and the deference model. The dominion model discerns vertical subjection to another's will, whereas by contrast the deference model places individuals in a complex and shifting webs of favor and disfavor.

Hobbes himself analyses the relation between men and women through the dominion model. Indeed, more broadly this is the most prominent model of interpersonal power relations throughout his texts. It is this model which is also reflected in the very rich existing feminist literature on Hobbes. However, the deference model, emerging only later in Hobbes's oeuvre, offers a superior general rubric for understanding interpersonal power relations. In particular, in light of its ability to grasp informal and diffuse relations of power, I argue that it offers useful insights for thinking about gender relations in our post-coverture era.

I will proceed as follows. First, I lay out Hobbes's model of interpersonal power relations as dominion, including his application of the model to the case of gender relations. Second, I indicate some shortcomings of the dominion model for grasping contemporary social life. Third, I establish Hobbes's alternative model of power as deference. Finally, I apply the alternative model to gender relations.

Dominion and gender relations

Power may be a central term in Hobbes's political theory, but the bulk of the scholarship has not considered his theory of interpersonal power, instead limiting its interest to his account of state power. The major exception to this rule is feminist studies of Hobbes. When Pateman seeks to understand power relations between men and women in her seminal feminist text *The Sexual Contract* (1991 [1988]), she defends an explicitly Hobbesian

analysis, centred on his notion of dominion, or—in Pateman's preferred language—the contract of domination. In the present section, I will set out Hobbes's conception of interpersonal power relations as dominion, and explain how it applies to gender relations.

The centrepiece of Hobbes's method is his 'state of nature' thought experiment. Hobbes imagines the state of nature as a domain of wary and isolated human beings without any political power ruling them (Hobbes 1983a, 41-50; Hobbes 2014, 188-96; 1651, 60-63). While the thought experiment is most famous for its bleak picture of natural human isolation and for its conclusions regarding state power, the thought experiment also lays out Hobbes's basic model of interpersonal power relations. In broad preliminary terms, when I speak of an interpersonal power relation, I am indicating a relation in which one individual is subject to the will of another; if the individual is subject only to their own will, then there is no power relation.

In Hobbes's state of nature, each individual is endowed with their own capacity-power—their *potentia*¹—including such components as their physical strength and their wit. Between such individuals, there are precisely three possible configurations of interpersonal relations: solitude/dissociation (*solitudo*), association (*consensio* or *societas*), and dominion (*dominium*). Of these, only the last is a power relation. Which of the three configurations manifests in a given case will depend on a comparison of the various individual capacity-powers. In Hobbes's initial discussion, he proposes that there are not generally great differences of capacity-power between humans (Hobbes 1983a, 45; Hobbes 2014 188-90; 1651, 60-61). Presuming individual A and B's respective capacity-powers are more or less equal, the two parties face two options. Either they could 'dissociate' (stay separate), as they each pursue their particular ends on their own. Or the two parties could enter into a horizontal relationship of 'association', laterally agreeing to work together for specific shared ends (Hobbes 1983a, 50, 86-88; Hobbes 2014, 256-8; 1651, 86-7). Neither of these options

amounts to a power relation. In the dissociation case, to be sure, the parties may find themselves in competition as they pursue their own ends, and whichever individual's capacity-power is even a little inferior will likely find less success in achieving those ends (EW IV.38). But losing out in a competition is not the same as having one's will subordinated to another. In the dissociation case, just as much as in the association case, each individual remains their own master.

Despite his initial proposal that humans are more or less equal in individual capacity-power, Hobbes goes on to consider the case where they are not. If it does happen that individual A's capacity-power is so much inferior to individual B's that A's life is in B's hands, Hobbes says that A ought to trade, or covenant², their submission to B in return for B sparing their life (EW IV.85; 1983a, 50). In this way, for instance, a sick person in the state of nature may find themselves subjected to a strong and healthy person. The covenant of submission establishes what Hobbes calls dominion or lordship. Dominion's structure is vertical: the submitting individual (A) becomes subject to the will of the lord or master (B), no longer their own will. As such, it is a relation of power between the parties. The relation of dominion rests on identifying what covenant would be rationally appropriate or can rationally be inferred, rather than on the actual existence of such a covenant. Hobbes does presume that there must be a deliberate desire on the side of the lord or master to assert dominion (Hobbes 1983a, 90). But there need not be any explicit consent from the submitting individual: instead, 'every man is supposed to promise obedience, to him, in whose power it is to save, or destroy him' (Hobbes 2014, 310; 1651, 103).³

Hobbes scales this taxonomy of relations up to the entire population in order to think about the civil state. The civil state or commonwealth comes about either 'by institution'—where equals, fearful of one another and finding association insufficiently durable, mutually covenant to establish an absolute sovereign over them (EW IV.199; Hobbes 1983a, 86-9;

Hobbes 2014, 256-62; 1651, 86-8)—or 'by acquisition'—where the weak fear a conqueror and submit to the conqueror as their absolute sovereign (EW IV.149; Hobbes 1983a, 66, 117; Hobbes 2014, 256, 306, 314; 1651, 86, 101, 104). Nonetheless, the states established by these alternative pathways share a final political structure: Hobbes conceives the absolute sovereignty of any commonwealth as dominion writ large. The commonwealth's subjects submit to the sovereign's will in just the same way that a subordinate within an interpersonal relation of dominion submits to their lord or master's will.

For Hobbes, the relation between a commonwealth's sovereign and its subjects is necessarily one of dominion, but the quality of the interpersonal relations between subjects of the commonwealth is not so constrained. At the sovereign's pleasure and subject to the sovereign's law, associations may be permitted within state (Hobbes 2014, 370; 1651, 121). Similarly, the sovereign can choose, as an exercise of its own power, to tolerate or establish little dominions. Although subjects can only obey one master, there is no conflict between sovereign A and lord B both claiming the submission of subject C, because lord B only remains lord at sovereign A's pleasure (Hobbes 1983a, 119; Hobbes 2014, 310, 314, 350; 1651, 103-4, 115-6).

I have presented the machinery of interpersonal relationships in the abstract, but in Hobbes's own presentation, it finds its sharpest illustration in the conjugal (male/female) and parental (parent/child) relationships comprising the family in the state of nature. Hobbes's analysis is radical insofar as he understands familial relations according to the general model of interpersonal relations just outlined, without any reference to *sui generis* principles.⁴

On Hobbes's account, there is a power relation of dominion of parent over child, simply in virtue of the stark difference of strength and wit between them, such that the child is dependent on the parent to preserve their life. Just as any denizen of the state of nature comes under the dominion of a greater power in return for sparing their life, the child comes

under the dominion of the parent. But a subject can only obey one master. So which parent? If the father held dominion over the mother, then the child would also fall under the father's dominion, because of the transitivity of dominion. But in state of nature, 'the inequality of their naturall forces is not so great, that the *man* could get the Dominion over the *woman* without warre' (Hobbes 1983a, 122; see also Hobbes 2014, 308; 1651, 102). With no dominion between them, men and women may either come together in horizontal voluntary association for shared ends, or just as likely they may only have transient contact, remaining isolated and wary of one another. The answer to who holds dominion over the child cannot be found from the relation between the parents but instead must be deduced from the different respective situations of the parents with regard to the child. Hobbes observes it is the mother who nurses the infant and cares for the child, even though she could abandon them. The obedience and allegiance the child owes for the preserving of their life is owed to their mother (EW IV.154-6; Hobbes 1983a, 121-3; Hobbes 2014, 308-10, 102-3). The state of nature is thus a matriarchy of little maternal dominions over children.

Against this backdrop, the reader might be surprised to find the Hobbesian civil state organized around the traditional patriarchal family. Once the commonwealth is established, it is structured as a polity of male political subjects, each of whom heads a household. Such households are subordinate dominions, with the father as the lord over the mother, children, and servants (EW IV.157; Hobbes 1983a, 124; Hobbes, 2014, 402, 528; 1651, 133, 178). Hobbes himself does not make explicit how specifically the patriarchal society emerges from the matriarchal state of nature, and this has sparked considerable discussion in the literature. Two main alternative reconstructions have been proposed. Pateman notes textual suggestion of an intermediate step between matriarchy and the civil state. Still in the state of nature, Hobbes mentions the existence of male-headed family units, which he analyses as little commonwealths (Hobbes 1983a, 123, 126; Hobbes 2014, 254-5, 368; 1651, 85, 121).

Pateman speculates that such family units come about through women's weakness due to pregnancy, bearing, and feeding infants, rendering otherwise robust women vulnerable to male domination.⁵ The social contract to establish the commonwealth occurs between male heads of households, subjecting the little family dominions to an overarching sovereign without interrupting their internal structure (Pateman 1991, 45-50; see also Schochet 2012; Hobbes 1983a, 124; Hobbes 2014, 308; 1651, 102-3). Others commentators disagree, finding the origin of patriarchy after the establishment of the civil state. On this alternative view, the social contract is truly universal, simultaneously conveying all adults—male and female—out of the state of nature as equals. But the sovereign then uses its absolute prerogative to establish male domestic dominion over the women of the commonwealth, whether in recognition of characteristic differences of capacity-power between the sexes (Lloyd 2012; 2020), or whether as a pure decision to empower men over women in spite of the absence of any deep underlying differences (Hirschmann 2012; Slomp 1994).

For the purposes of this paper's argument, nothing hangs on which reconstruction is favored. The key point is that Hobbesian feminists, despite their other disagreements, carry over Hobbes's framework for analysing interpersonal power relations. Whether commentators celebrate women's equal status in the state of nature or regret their subordination in the commonwealth, they draw on a Hobbesian division between (on the one hand) vertical power relations of dominion/domination and (on the other hand) equality in lateral mutual associations.⁶

Sexual stratification without domination.

In this section, I will argue that Hobbes's model of power relations as dominion is analytically impoverished. While it is useful for understanding coverture and its long shadow over law and society, it fails to grapple with some prominent elements of contemporary sexual hierarchy.

Let me start by outlining why Pateman thinks Hobbes's model of power relations as dominion is a good model—indeed, the model—of contemporary patriarchy. *The Sexual Contract* is driven by a suspicion of an orthodoxy concerning political progress. According to this orthodoxy, politics was once concerned with naturalized relationships and status, emblematically patriarchal politics, where the political authority of kings was both founded on and modelled on the natural authority of father over son. According to this orthodoxy, through the early modern period status the politics of status and hierarchy gave way to a politics of freedom and equality, whereby authority can only be founded on contract and consent. Pateman's book challenges the simple association between contract and freedom. For there is such a thing as a contract of domination, canonically the slave contract. And Pateman's central claim is that 'contract is the means through which modern patriarchy is constituted' (Pateman 1991, 2). The much-celebrated social contract between equal male citizens is quietly underpinned by the sexual contract, a contract of domination between men and women (Pateman 1991, 1-12). Hobbes's work takes a central place in Pateman's argument. First, Hobbes's theory explicitly recognizes what Pateman calls contracts of domination (Hobbes's dominion). Second, Hobbes's unsentimental willingness to apply his analysis of contract and domination to familial relations unmasks a stark power relation otherwise often concealed by ideas of natural roles or bonds of love (Pateman 1991, 39-50).

Consider now how Pateman's Hobbesian model of sexual domination fares in grasping real-world arrangements of sexual difference. To defend its applicability, Pateman marshalls considerable evidence from 'Western' (primarily US and UK) legal codes and social histories. On her account, the core institution of sexual domination has been the marriage contract under the legal doctrine of coverture. By this doctrine, the husband's legal identity 'covers' for that of the wife. But Pateman argues that the marriage contract under coverture brings about the wife's civil death, like a slave (Pateman 1991, 119).⁷ Under

coverture, although women 'consented' through marriage to their place in the male-headed household, women had no real option not to marry, and the standard terms to which they had to consent gave them over to their husbands as slaves to masters. She points to a long history of wife-selling in England as one of the most stark illustrations of the slave-like status of wives (Pateman 1991, 121). But the slave-like status of wives found more quotidian expression in the unlimited right of husbands to their wives' unremunerated labor, and husbands' unlimited sexual access to their wives' bodies. For labor, this was manifested in laws excluding women from employment on marrying, or requiring the husband's permission for a woman to work outside the home, and assigning damages if a woman is prevented from working at home. It extended even beyond women in actual marriage contracts: unwed women living with relations were presumed to do the domestic work in the home (Pateman 1991, 126-40). For sexual access, entering into marriage was taken to constitute permanent consent to sexual contact, making rape within marriage a legal impossibility (the so-called marital rape immunity) (Pateman 1991, 7, 123-4; Klarfeld 2011).

Even as the legal doctrine of coverture has been incrementally dismantled, Pateman sees its long shadow well into her (1980s) present (Pateman 1991, 222-7). By that time, in the jurisdictions that constitute Pateman's core cases, a married woman was no longer formally under her husband's will. Nonetheless, there were some specific legal remnants of coverture still in force. Marital rape has only been criminalized in all US states since 1993 (Klarfeld 2011, 1819). And the social structures associated with the law of coverture persisted.⁸ Workplace arrangements frequently presumed a worker with a wife at home, and domestic labor remained a stubbornly female obligation (Hochschild 2012 [1989]). Indeed, in the present day, and despite some progress, marital rape is still an issue in the law. In some US jurisdictions, marital rape is only a criminal offence if there is aggravated force or violence (Klarfeld 2011, 1834).⁹ Similarly, the domestic division of labor has persisted,¹⁰ and has been

laid bare particularly sharply during the current (2020) pandemic insofar as the normal public helps to domestic functioning (notably, schools and daycares) are not available.

Nonetheless, I propose that Pateman's model of domination cannot usefully serve as a general rubric for understanding power relations between men and women. I'll now consider two current issues in the feminist literature and in public debate.¹¹ Pateman's book predates these specific issues by three decades, but I will attempt to grasp their significance using Pateman's conceptual frame. The first issue is sexual harassment outside the home. The #metoo social media movement¹² has brought to light the previously hidden prevalence of sexual harassment and assault, mostly of women, by people in gatekeeping positions, mostly men (MacKinnon 2019). *The Sexual Contract* offers a brief discussion of sexual harassment. Workplace sexual harassment is analysed as 'help[ing] maintain men's patriarchal right in the public world' (Pateman 1991, 142). Men harass women to punish them for being 'trespassers' into the male public world, rather than staying in their proper domestic servitude where they belong (Pateman 1991, 141).

The second issue is the reckless and harmful treatment of women's medical conditions. A key current example is the vaginal mesh tape scandal. In recent decades, mesh tape came to be aggressively promoted as a treatment for some common complications of childbirth, but the normal best practices establishing use and tracking safety of medical devices were not followed. While successful for many recipients, the mesh tape caused excruciating pain and permanent incapacitation for a significant proportion of cases. A recent UK inquiry determined that the widespread harm was a systematic result of the medical and scientific community downplaying and ignoring the women's testimony and complaints (Cumberlege 2020, 17-18, 153). *The Sexual Contract* emphasizes the submersion of the wife into the husband's civil personality. As a corollary, men's voices are authoritative, and women's voices need to find male mediation to be acknowledged. This feature of gender

relations is reflected in the once-common practice of addressing a woman by her husband's name (Mrs John Doe), and in the extreme hostility directed towards wives of famous intellectuals who do not simply cheer on their husbands but who have an independent intellectual life of their own (Pateman 1991, 160). From this point of view, it is no surprise that complaints regarding procedures performed only on women are poorly heard.

My suggestions for how Pateman's (1980s) framework would analyse these current cases remain speculative, but I have held to the core of her understanding of gender relations throughout her book: when there are power relations between men and women, they either approximate or attempt to reinstitute the sexual contract. The man is to be master over the women, the woman is to be removed from the public domain and is to access it only through the man. This analysis reflects a Hobbesian understanding of the possible configurations of interpersonal relations: either horizontal association or vertical dominion. Within the Hobbesian frame, if we want to deny that certain individuals are equal voluntary co-contractors, if we want to deny that women in our society are fully their own masters and we want to say instead that there is a power relation between women and men, then we must identify a vertical relation of domination over them, where men deliberately subordinate women's wills under their own.

The difficulty is that these two contemporary cases do not convincingly fit the terms of Hobbes's analysis. I will suggest that the hierarchy in these two cases is frequently much more informal, diffuse, and unintentional, neither approximating nor aspiring to approximate vertical domination. For sexual harassment, I grant there are surely cases where the perpetrator of the sexual harassment or assault either wishes to achieve total dominion over a woman, or to force her back into the domestic domain. But equally, surely there are cases where the perpetrator lacks aspiration to either of these things. Some perpetrators may harass because it is pleasurable or funny to them, and because they face no serious

repercussions or negative blowback for their behavior. They may harass to build rapport, prestige, or authority with onlooking coworkers. Putting aside perpetrator intent, the concrete outcome of the behavior also in many cases may neither approach nor approximate dominion. Some women may find themselves totally dominated, their will in full thrall of their harasser. But other times, the woman does not lose full control of her will, instead she strategically accommodates the various male wills around her in order to achieve her other goals. In particular, she may put up with sexual harassment from various men because she judges that the prospects of addressing it are poor, and because putting up with it might put her in better stead for the other priorities she wishes to pursue.

Now consider the reckless treatment of women's health and the failure to listen to complaints. In this day and age, in the jurisdictions that are Pateman's foci, it would be hard to find anyone explicitly defending the idea that women lack the standing to speak on their own account. To the contrary, most would vehemently oppose such an idea. The issue to be explained is how these explicit egalitarian commitments coexist with differential modes of behavior, such as taking women's testimony less seriously, paying less attention, and extending less respect to women's ideas and needs. Even those combatting this differential respect for women's testimony can fall into habits of privileging men: Cumberlege herself gives early and disproportionate prominence to the testimony of the *husband* of one of the sufferers of pelvic mesh complications (Cumberlege 2020, 19). But the dominion model is implausible as an account of the motivation and outcome of these behaviors. As to motivation, the dominion model would understand the lesser credence accorded to women's testimony, by both men and women, as a manifestation of patriarchal crypto-desire to silence women and only allow husbands to speak on their wives' behalf. Is this really the best explanation of the behavior? As to outcome, it is not generally the case that women are required to mediate their voices through male spokespeople (although sometimes that does

occur). The general phenomenon is that they are allowed to speak, but are just taken less seriously, which hardly amounts to the clean vertical subordination that is the core of the model of dominion.

To take dominion/domination as the general rubric for understanding interpersonal power is to risk distorting our understanding of contemporary cases. If a Hobbesian feminist like Pateman is convinced that men and women are not cooperating as free and equal associates working towards shared goals, then to show this, they need instead to locate a relation of dominion.¹³ That is, they need to argue that the man is making (or is attempting to make) the woman fully subject to his will, or is attempting to remove the woman from the public domain as an actor with an independent will. A skeptic might quite reasonably view this analysis or imputation of motives as exorbitant, and deny that domination occurs. Without the conceptual vocabulary to grasp any middle ground between association and dominion, our Hobbesian feminist and skeptic are locked in a polemical debate. What would be needed is some way to talk about power relations short of dominion. The core phenomenon for this kind of relation will be a partial asymmetrical influencing of wills, a partial shaping of behavior, that I will call deference.

The alternative model: deference

At the outset, I laid out a general understanding of interpersonal power relations. A power relation is one in which one party finds their action mediated by the will of the other, rather than each simply doing what they what they want to do to the extent that they can. To this point, I have followed Hobbes's early work in presuming that being subject to another's will must amount to dominion/domination, or in other words, vertical total subjection to the will of a single master. But dominion is not Hobbes's only way of thinking about power relations. There is an alternative concept of what I will call power as deference, whereby individuals routinely mediate their desires via others' wills, but without being totally

subjected.¹⁴ The relation of deference is a relatively durable asymmetrical relationship of wills which falls short of dominion, but which is irreducible to lateral associations for shared ends.¹⁵ This concept of deference is superior for its ability to grasp informal and diffuse relations of power. In this section, I will reconstruct Hobbes's generic presentation of the relationship of deference, before applying it to gender relations in the next section.

The relationship of deference emerges in Hobbes's *Leviathan* Chapter 10, in the course of Hobbes's discussion of honor. The key terms are (Hobbes 2014, 132-6; 1651, 41-2):

a person's capacity-power [10.1]: their 'present means, to obtain some future apparent Good'

a person's value [10.16]: 'his Price; that is to say, so much as would be given for the use of his Power'

honor/dishonor [10.17]: 'the manifestation of the Value we set on one another [...] To Value a man at a high rate, is to *Honour* him; at a low rate, is to *Dishonour* him'

Honor is thus the rubric under which we can group all action manifesting desire for the use of another's capacity-power. This desire turns out to be a central driver of human action. Indeed, Hobbes's understanding of honor can account neatly for the functioning of interpersonal dominion.

[10.20] To obey, is to Honour; because no man obeys them, whom they think have no power to help, or hurt them. And consequently to disobey, is to *Dishonour* (Hobbes 2014, 136; 1651, 41).

The person submitting to a lord's dominion, which centrally involves obedience to the lord, does so to secure their life in the face of the lord's threats. The analysis in terms of honor gives a characterization of the motivation of the submitting party: their obedience is a manifestation of their hope to channel the lord's power in a useful rather than hostile way.

Is dominion's complete pledged submission the only way to try to get use of another's capacity-power? Hobbes spends some time exploring other behaviors that might contribute to shaping the actions of those around us. We have the very obvious strategy of directly requesting help:

[10.19] To pray to another, for ayde of any kind, is *to* HONOUR; because a sign we have an opinion he has power to help; and the more difficult the ayde is, the more is the Honour. (Hobbes 2014, 136; 1651, 41)

But Hobbes extends beyond obvious examples to the full gamut of interpersonal conduct: for him, a huge array of everyday behaviors have a valence either as honor or as dishonor (Hobbes 2014, 136-48; 1651, 42-7). It is honor:

[10.22] To be sedulous in promoting anothers good

[10.23] To give way, or place to another, in any Commodity

[10.24] To shew any signe of love, or feare of another

[10.26] To speak to another with consideration, to appear before him with decency, and humility

[10.27] To believe, to trust, to rely on another

[10.28] To hearken to a mans counsell

[10.30] To agree with in opinion

[10.32] To honour those another honours

How do all these examples count as honor, that is, as expressing a desire to make use of the capacity-power of the honoree? In Hobbes's discussion of these behaviors, a certain model of social life emerges. By this model, we constantly encounter others whose actions may assist or inhibit our own, to greater or lesser degree. But every little thing we do may influence to the propensity of those others to assist us and not inhibit us, depending on how our actions impinge upon their desires and preferences. For instance, being slovenly rather than decent might cause offence and irritation, and diminish the inclination of the offended party to help out (Hobbes 2014, 136; 1651, 43 [10.26]). As we negotiate the social field, we take care to draw the favor and/or avoid the hostility those around us, in particular by taking care not needlessly to hinder the desires and preferences of those around us. I propose calling all these behaviors forms of 'deference'. For the common point between all honors is that they serve to placate and propitiate those identified as powerful, or in other words, they 'defer' to the desires of the powerful. Social life is constituted as complex and constantly recalibrating webs of deference.

There are a number of striking features to this model of social relations as deference. First, there is no opt-out. The complex web of deference grounded in honor is pervasive not only because there are a wide range of behaviors which have a valence as honor or dishonor. It is also pervasive because an individual's behavior has a valence as honor or dishonor, and an impact on others, regardless of that individual's intentions. On the one hand, the interpretation of an individual's behavior as honor or dishonor is in the eye of the honoree. Thus, failing to render the expected honor to the powerful often counts as dishonor, and may incur the irritation or retribution of the dishonoree (Hobbes 2014, 136-8; 1651, 42-3 [10.29]). On the other hand, a powerful individual behaving thoughtlessly without regard to their impact on others may unwittingly incite others' deference (from the others' attempts to shape and mitigate the powerful individual's impacts).

The second feature is the tendency to inequality. An egalitarian social domain, in which all give and receive deference in equal measure (more or less, when everything is taken into account), is not impossible. But the Hobbesian analysis reveals a tendency away from such equality. We cannot agree with everyone's opinion, even if we try; we cannot be sedulous with everyone's good. Instead, we tend to distribute our energies according to the risk and benefit in question. In other words, we take special care with those those who hold more power, leaving lesser energy available for care for those who appear less positioned to help or to harm. An insignificant person is likely to find noone deferring to them, instead facing dismissive and inconsiderate treatment from the rest of society. Worse, they may find that even their own deference to the powerful is rewarded only in small ways, or not at all (Hobbes 2014, 136; 1651, 42 [10.21]), reflecting the limited help or harm they are capable of inflicting on the powerful. These inequality-generating dynamics can come in play even if the parties have no desire to increase inequality.

The third striking feature is the low salience of specific individual capacity-powers in the dynamics of deference. Deference is given to the powerful, but who are they? In Hobbes's discussion of the state of nature, the key examples of capacity-power are wit and strength (EW IV.81-2; Hobbes 1983a, 45; Hobbes 2014, 188; 1651, 60-1; see also EW IV.38-9). But in *Leviathan's* core analysis of power and deference, these erstwhile key examples are displaced, and patterns of deference become potentially disconnected from any particular independently specifiable personal attribute or faculty (Field, 2014). Capacity-power's definition as 'means to future goods' is open: in principle, personal attributes or faculties could constitute capacity-power. But candidate capacity-powers that are not socially upheld are practically useless as means to future goods. For instance, whatever its other merits, science is 'small power', because most people do not recognize its benefits and so do not render assistance and service to its bearers (Hobbes 2014, 134; 1651, 42). It is no use to be a great scientist if you are harassed in the street and no one comes to your aid. Because personal attributes count as powers primarily in virtue of the assistance or forbearance they generate, they recede from the centre of Hobbes's analysis, leaving in their place remarkable looping formulations (Hobbes 2014, 132-4; 1651, 41):

[10.7] 'what quality soever maketh a man beloved, or feared of many, or the reputation of such quality, is Power; because it is a means to have the assistance, and service of many'

[10.5] 'Reputation of power, is Power; because it draweth with it the adhaerence of those that need protection'

[10.2] 'the nature of Power, is [...] like to Fame, increasing as it proceeds.'

Deference to power is action within the existing uneven social web, guided by the judgement of social support for or hostility to various courses of action. For instance, if I believe that someone has many supporters, I should take care not to draw their displeasure. In other words, deference is action guided by judgements about others' likely patterns of deference and non-deference; deference both recognizes and constitutes power. The patterns of deference congeal not primarily around individual capacities, but instead around networks of allegiance, shaped by frameworks of law and political status (Hobbes 2014, 136-140; 1651, 42-4 [10.34-5, 10.44]).

I claim that deference represents a new form of social relations not recognized in the previous three-way taxonomy of dissociation, association, and dominion that structures Hobbes's discussion of the state of nature.¹⁶ According to the model of lateral association, equal individuals decide to pursue a particular shared goal or end, but all the while, each remains master of their own will (Hobbes 1983a, 87). By contrast, in the relation of deference there need not be shared ends. The deferring individual (the honorer) advances their own goals only indirectly, by trying to bring the powerful to have a general disposition to help and not hinder their projects. To do this, the honorer often works directly for the powerful person's goals, being 'sedulous in promoting [the powerful person's] good' and 'giv[ing] way' to their priorities (Hobbes 2014, 136; 1651, 42). I propose that, unlike the parties in an association for shared ends, the deferring individual not fully master of their own will. It might be objected that the deferring individual is working in best way they can to advance own ends, surely this means they are their own master. But for Hobbes, everyone, whether slave or master, seeks to advance their own ends as best they can. The deferring individual is not fully their own master because the particular way that they advance their own ends is through deferring to the ends of another, in hope that this may yield some future recompense.

In result, the bond between the collaborators is stronger and more asymmetrical than association. In the case of association for shared ends, equal collaborators on a shared project can simply go their separate ways when they disagree (Hobbes 2014, 256; 1651, 86). By contrast, in a relationship of deference, a client may continue to cooperate on their patron's projects, despite skepticism regarding the project's goals or the patron's chosen means to achieve them, in order to keep the patronage relationship alive. In this sense, there is a hierarchical relation between wills, with the deferring individual partially submitting to the honoree's will. Consequently, I propose that the relationship of deference merits being classed as a relation of power.

At the same time, even though deference is a power relation involving a hierarchical positioning of wills, it does not in general amount to the vertical mastery/subjectation of dominion. On the dominion model, the lord has the intent to rule over their subordinate, and the lord is the master of subordinate's will. Correspondingly, the subordinate submits fully to the lord's will, recognising only a single master. By contrast, in the model of deference, the subordinate (the deferring individual, the honorer) is likely to be simultaneously honoring multiple actors. They undertake a partial and contextual bending of their conduct to various others' wills in order to gain the social support they need, and they are not entirely beholden to any particular honoree if the desired support can be achieved elsewhere. Furthermore, the power relation of deference does not rely on any intent of powerful honoree to control the honorer. The powerful may act deliberately to influence the action of their subordinate, but equally they may simply fail to pay attention to the impact of their actions on others, for there is little consequence to the powerful for this thoughtlessness. If A does not positively desire to garner B's assistance, and if A does not fear offending B, then it is easy for A just to do as they please, not taking care to ensure their actions respect B's needs and concerns (Hobbes 2014, 136; 1651, 42-3 [10.22, 10.26]). Indeed, a powerful person could remain oblivious to

the efforts made by the honorers to attract their favor or avoid their malice. On the model of deference, there is a power relation without the powerful being masters of the subordinates.

The relation of deference is neither association nor dominion, but it should not be classed as a fourth variety for a social relationship to our previous taxonomy of three. Rather, I suggest that the relation of deference can be conceived as the fundamental form of social relationship, pervasive throughout human social life; association and dominion can be conceived as special cases of deference. For relations of deference can be more or less asymmetrical. The situation where the parties' reciprocal estimate of each others' power is symmetrical stands as one extreme possibility or limit case, corresponding to horizontal association on mutual ends. Vertical dominion stands as the other extreme, where the deferring individual's hope of help and the fear of harm focussed entirely onto a single master. Thus we have a continuum of power relations, running from the small reciprocal deferences that may occur everyday even between friends, encompassing the unfortunate need to bow and scrape to those who hold the keys to money or public opinion, right through to near-vertical deference to a single overpowering master which may better be termed dominion or domination.

What explains Hobbes's early insistence on dominion as the rubric of power relations, and the absence of a conception of power relations as degrees of deference? I speculate that many of the real-world phenomena commanding Hobbes's attention were *prima facie* plausibly interpreted through the rubric of a stark choice between vertical dominion and horizontal association. In the context of a breakdown of authority like the English civil war, a critical question of power is the juridical one, who has the right to make decisions and issue commands? Such a question naturally receives a binary answer: either a certain person has the right to command, or they do not. Indeed, for Hobbes, any ambiguity regarding the right to command is fatal to peace (Hobbes, 1983a, Chapter 6). The same binary approach is also

natural at the more interpersonal level: in Hobbes's time, various individuals (women, children, servants) fell formally under the domestic authority of others. The roles and the relationships are well defined; the question is simply the justification for this arrangement. Thus in some times and places, the relations between members of society may well take the form of dominion. But the idea of deference opens up the conceptual possibility that a social order can be pervaded by power relations even in the absence of dominion.

Deference and gender relations

Hobbes himself does not apply model of deference to power relations between the sexes. Indeed, this is not particularly surprising. For first, the central phenomenon of sexual hierarchy in Hobbes's time—coverture—is more or less adequately accommodated by the dominion model, whereas by contrast its deficiencies as a model for understanding the commonwealth were laid bare by the protracted turmoil of the English civil war (Field 2020, Chapters 2-4). Second, it is not clear that Hobbes has any particular interest in gender relations himself, except insofar as their analysis can serve as a polemical tool against his theoretical opponents who model politics on the family (Schochet 2012; Wright 2002). In this final section, I will do what Hobbes did not, and apply the model of deference to the question of gender relations. The model of deference can accommodate coverture's relations of domination, but it also provides a theoretical frame for understanding a broader range of gendered power relations, including the two contemporary examples raised earlier in this essay.

According to the model of deference, people defer to those who are positioned to help or harm them. Under the law of coverture, each woman's husband was uniquely¹⁷ well positioned to advance or thwart her desires and needs, for she was under his sway with respect to her body (his free and exclusive sexual access) and her labor (both inside and

outside the home). In consequence, the woman's deference was tightly focussed on her husband, with the deference so vertical as to count as dominion.

In the present day, the full law of coverture is no longer in place, although we live with some of its legal, political, and cultural remnants. Indeed, these remnants go a long way to constituting the difference between men and women's average respective capacity-powers. But I argued above that contemporary interpersonal relations between men and women are not overall usefully conceived as dominion, by pointing out two contemporary cases that fit poorly with the dominion model of power. I don't deny that there are still many cases of actual or attempted domination between men and women. Some of the more lurid cases of sexual assault and domestic abuse take the form of an assertion of male mastery over women; some people may wilfully hark back to the old gender configuration of the male dominion and female subordination (Manne 2018; Hill 2019). But focusing on those cases can lead us to miss or mischaracterize more quotidian contemporary phenomena. The distinctive diffuseness and thoughtlessness of many contemporary gender power relations is better captured by the conception of power as deference, not dominion.

Let us see how the deference model neatly accounts for the #metoo phenomenon of pervasive sexual harassment. Recall my objection, that the dominion model implausibly imputes to all harassers the aspiration to dominate and control. On the deference model by contrast, harassment can be explained without this imputation. On this model, we can expect the powerful not to pay attention to the needs and desires of those judged less powerful; or even if they are aware of those needs and desires, they may be insufficiently motivated to rein in their own behaviors that negatively impinge upon others. Core behaviors of harassment—being obscene, neglecting a person's good (Hobbes 2014, 136; 1651, 42 [10.22-23])—readily arise when that person is viewed as low in power. Thus if #metoo harassers find pleasure or

satisfaction in harassing, they may persist in their conduct because women do not have significant enough power and status to demand that they desist.

Recall my further objection, that the dominion model implausibly models women's compliance and silence in the face of harassment as evidence of deep subjection. But on the deference model, compliance can also be a more ambivalent phenomenon: alongside cases of deep subjection, there will be cases closer to appeasement or propitiation. On the deference model, one key motivator of behavior is seeking to shape the conduct of the powerful in one's favor, seeking to secure their support and avoid their hostility. This is done by taking care not to annoy powerful people, instead ingratiating oneself with them and accommodating their desires: don't annoy your boss, smile for the guy in the street, don't complain about handsiness. In this way, women may weigh up their priorities and end up reluctantly accommodating the sexual advances of men who are in a position to affect their fate.

Finally, there was one further feature of the #metoo cases left poorly explained by the dominion model. In many cases, bystanders do not call out the poor behavior of harassers. Instead, they often circle the wagons around the perpetrator. Even other women, whom one might have thought would feel common cause and sympathy with the victims of harassment, may fail to display any meaningful solidarity. This phenomenon is readily explained by the deference model: 'To honour [a powerful individual's] Enemies, is to Dishonour him.' (Hobbes 2014, 138; 1651, 43 [10.32]). Third parties to a problematic incident don't want to draw ire of the powerful by criticizing or displeasing them in any way. They may even take extra pains to affirm and support their patron, recognising the dangers of standing up to bullies, and the rewards for turning a blind eye.

Let us now turn to the case of reckless treatment of women's medical issues. Recall Cumberlege's diagnosis: the recklessness is a consequence of women's testimonies not being taken seriously. I objected to viewing this phenomenon through the dominion model, because

it implausibly accounts for self-proclaimed egalitarians not taking women's ideas seriously as a matter of a subterranean crypto-desire to silence women or to deny women's right to speak on own behalf. A superior approach for theorizing the phenomenon is provided by Fricker's concept of 'testimonial injustice'. On this approach, women's ideas are not taken less seriously than men's because of the listeners' desire to silence women, but rather because listeners (both men and women) have internalized stereotypes that assess women's testimony as less credible than that of men (Fricker 2007, 9-30). But Fricker's account raises questions of its own. She notes that in fact less powerful groups are stereotyped as less authoritative, but why is this so? and where do these stereotypes come from? The Hobbesian model of deference can offer an answer. On this model, people fail to take less powerful individuals seriously precisely *because* they are less powerful.

For Hobbes, various positive listening practices—believing, trusting, listening, paying attention, agreeing, respecting judgement—all count as honor, and their contraries count as dishonor (Hobbes 2014, 136; 1651, 43 [10.27-28]). But there are two ways in which this might be the case. First and more obviously, these honors might manifest an opinion of the specific powers of wisdom, wit, or good judgement of the person honored; in Fricker's testimonial injustice, honor is withheld because the listener (mistakenly) has a low opinion of the speaker's possession of these specific powers. For Hobbes, however, there is also a second way. As I have shown, people may be powerful in terms of having considerable social support, even though they lack specific capacity-powers such as wisdom. According to the deference model, such powerful persons are likely to be honored, by others who seek to draw their assistance and avoid their hostility. But to honor someone, you must do those things 'which he takes for signes of Honour' (Hobbes 2014, 138; 1651, 43 [10.29])—as for instance the positive listening practices outlined above. We may listen and pay attention to the powerful even if we do not judge them to be wise, because otherwise we risk incurring their

wrath or missing out on their favors. An employee will not generally yawn or roll their eyes to their boss's face. Conversely, there is no sanction for ignoring unimportant or uninfluential people. The social consequence is that there are mechanisms generating differential attention and credence in ways that map social power rather than any strong opinion of the good judgement or trustworthiness of the persons so honored. This process may well give rise to stereotypes: it would be easy to misunderstand a pervasive social practice dishonoring certain people's wisdom and trustworthiness by failing to listen respectfully to them as constituting good evidence of an actual underlying lack of wisdom and trustworthiness in those people. But the salient point here is that one can genuinely reject a stereotype of a group's epistemic unreliability yet still behave in negative differential ways towards that group. It was easier for doctors and scientists to downplay women's reports of intense pain as their mesh implants cut through their viscera, than to entertain seriously challenging the established understanding of the medical profession and the enthusiastic representations of the medical device manufacturers, just as it was useful for Cumberlege to foreground a husband's testimony in order to underscore the trustworthiness of her claims to her readership.

In sum, the Hobbesian conception of power relations as deference is a superior model, compared to the more familiar conception of power relations as dominion/domination, for identifying and for analysing power relations between the sexes. On this model, women's subjection to male desires, projects, and understanding can be characterized without the need either for overstating the degree and character of women's disempowerment, or for positing a general society-wide crypto-desire to control women, silence them, or put them back in the home.

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¹ Hobbes's Latin terms *potentia* and *potestas* correspond to his single English term power. I disambiguate by referring to *potentia* as capacity-power.

² A covenant is a variety of contract. A contract is a mutual exchange of right; if the right to a thing is exchanged but the thing itself is only delivered in the future, then the contract is a covenant (Hobbes, 2014, 204; 1651, 66).

³ Hobbes does make the point that bound slaves are not in the master's dominion. But the failure of dominion is due to the binding, not the lack of explicit covenant. Unbound slaves, even without explicit covenant, are taken to have consented to dominion (Hobbes 1983a, 118; Hobbes 2014, 312; 1651, 104). Hobbes uses the same logic to explain God's dominion over humans (Hobbes 2014, 558; 1651, 187).

⁴ There is an ample and excellent literature discussing the remarkable extent of Hobbes's defiance of contemporary wisdom and pieties about women. Notably Sreedhar 2020; Wright 2002.

⁵ Pateman herself doesn't think it quite works (1991, 49): who would rationally want children, if the predictable consequence is slave-like subjection to men?

⁶ Lloyd furnishes a partial exception, see note 14 below.

⁷ Slavery is not merely a rhetorical point of reference. While *The Sexual Contract* focusses on sex, it also already flags a racial underbelly to the social contract (Pateman 1991, 62-76, 220-1, & *passim*), a suggestion fleshed out in greater detail in Pateman's later collaborations with Charles Mills (Pateman and Mills, 2007).

⁸ Other current phenomena fitting neatly within this theoretical frame might include domestic violence and coercive control. See Hill, 2019.

⁹ There are other jurisdictions inheriting British legal codes that have not criminalized marital rape (Makkar, 2019).

¹⁰ Hochschild's [1989] classic sociological investigation remained sufficiently relevant to be reissued 23 years after its original publication (Hochschild 2012).

¹¹ I pursue these two examples in part because they have received a lot of recent attention. I do not make any claim about their importance or representativeness compared to other issues pursued by feminists.

¹² In this paper, I focus only on the problem that #metoo identified, taking no view on the particular strategy of #metoo to ameliorate it.

¹³ Indeed, the purpose of the analysis is to awaken readers to 'systematic social injustice' (Mills, in Pateman & Mills 2007, 93).

¹⁴ Generally, feminist Hobbes scholars have limited themselves to the question of domination, in part because that reflects Hobbes's own framework for discussing sexual difference. However, in her reconstruction of the origins of Hobbesian sexual domination, S. A. Lloyd (2012; 2020) has given a central role to socially generated

relational power (power as deference in my terms). I want to dwell on what this power might amount to taken in itself, even when it does not intensify to the point of supporting domination.

¹⁵ Related themes are developed in more detail in Field 2014 and Field 2020, Chapters 2-4.

¹⁶ *Leviathan's* initial sketch (10.3) appears to reassert the division between lateral association of independent wills and vertical dominion with one will master over the others (Hobbes 2014, 132; 1651, 41). However, as I argue, the new vision of association that is developed through the chapter involves partial dependence of wills.

¹⁷ This characterization might only be sustainable for women in dominant social groups: for women in subjected classes or racialized groups, there may also be other power figures apart from their husbands to contend with.