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LOMA LINDA UNIVERSITY
School of Behavioral Health
in conjunction with the
Department of Psychology

Power: A Qualitative Exploration of POWs in Captivity and Their Responses to Loss of
Control

by

Sean Michael Roche

A Project submitted in partial satisfaction of
the requirements for the degree
Doctor of Psychology

September 2022

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Each person whose signature appears below certifies that this doctoral project in his/her opinion is adequate, in scope and quality, as a doctoral project for the degree Doctor of Psychology.

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ABBREVIATIONS

POW	Prisoner of War
NV	North Vietnamese

ABSTRACT OF THE DOCTORAL PROJECT

Power: A Qualitative Exploration of POWs in
Captivity and Their Responses to Loss of Control

by

Sean Michael Roche

Doctor of Psychology, Department of Psychology
Loma Linda University, September 2022
Dr. Bryan Cafferky, Chairperson

This qualitative study explored how American Prisoners of War (POWs) from the Vietnam War coped with the dramatic imbalance of power between them and their North Vietnamese captors. Semi-structured interviews with POWs (n = 16) were analyzed using phenomenological and grounded theory approaches to identify major themes and coping strategies embedded in their experiences of powerlessness. POWs shared emergent themes of Communication, Connection, Heroic Leadership, Establishing Our Routine, and Honor and Loyalty, which were then linked with components of Emerson's theory of power-dependence relations. Many of these strategies functioned interdependently, which allowed these men to more effectively combat imbalances of power and produce a limited sense of agency for themselves and their fellow captured service members. These findings may aid clinicians in identifying critical areas for intervention with individuals who suffered traumas in group settings and may inform how future service members are trained.

CHAPTER ONE

LITERATURE REVIEW

Historical Background

A proverbial storm of political and ideological influences put the United States and Vietnam on a collision course for war. When told from the perspective of the United States (and its allied faction, the former nation of South Vietnam), the conflict in Vietnam was often characterized as a fight against the spread of Communism and in defense of the democratic government in Saigon. While the US foreign policy of containment (limiting the spread and influence of the Soviet Union, China and its communist allies by propping up non-communist governments) was certainly instrumental in its decision to eventually enter into the war, any claims of support for the spread of democracy or the moral superiority of President Ngo Dinh Diem's government in Saigon are more dubious (Small, 2005).

After successfully securing their independence from French colonial forces in 1954, Vietnam was effectively split in half, with the north controlled by pro-communism war hero Ho Chi Minh and the south controlled by Diem, on the condition that a 1956 general election would allow the people to select a unified government for one Vietnam. Diem opted against holding national elections in 1956 because he reportedly feared he would lose to Minh. Despite this violation of the terms that the Geneva Conference established two years earlier, the United States continued to back Diem, largely on grounds that suppressing communism was more important than expanding democracy. This approach to post-WWII foreign policy was driven by the Domino Theory (Small,

2005). First described by President Dwight Eisenhower in 1954, Domino Theory is essentially the idea that if one country in a given region succumbed to the pressure and adopted communism, others in that same region would become communist via a “domino effect.” As such, US foreign policy throughout the Cold War was defined by the mission to contain the spread of communism by any means necessary.

North Vietnam’s perspective is more conspicuous. After bearing the brunt of the fight against French forces, Minh was forced to postpone his stated goal of a unified communist Vietnam until the elections of 1956. When these elections were cancelled by the US-backed government of South Vietnam, Minh and his supporters mounted an open rebellion (Wiest, 2002). Initially, US active involvement was limited to an advisory role for the South Vietnamese military. By 1961, Northern forces, with the support of Chinese strategists and Soviet supplies, had managed to win a string of victories over their Southern neighbors and were beginning to destabilize Diem’s grip on the government. At this point, President Kennedy substantially increased the number of US advisers in Vietnam and began establishing bases of operation in the event that further escalation was deemed necessary (Small, 2005). President Johnson continued this trend of increasing American military involvement in Vietnam. He initiated a bombing campaign against the North via US Navy and Air Force planes in 1965. By 1966 there were over 400,000 US troops stationed in Vietnam and the US, China and USSR were fully engaged in a war by proxy.

While open warfare raged in Southeast Asia, the American home front was being upended by social and political movements that shaped government policy towards the war effort and permanently altered the trajectory of American life. As the US government

began its slow escalation of involvement in Vietnam, the Civil Rights Movement gathered support and momentum against the systematic and widespread oppression of African-Americans that had persisted throughout the history of the United States (Zinn, 2003). Many states, particularly those in the so-called Deep South, resisted the integration of African-Americans into previously segregated schools, bathrooms, restaurants and public facilities. Domestic terrorist groups such as the Ku Klux Klan attacked, bombed and assassinated key leaders of the movement in a coordinated and sustained attempt to suppress African-Americans and preserve the racist status quo (Zinn, 2003).

The protracted nature of the war and a streamlining of the information pathway from field journalists to the general public facilitated anti-war and anti-draft movements domestically. For the first time in history, the American people could view the horrors of war on their living room televisions (Small, 2005). As the years passed and the death toll mounted, public support for the war waned and a movement for peace developed in and spread throughout US universities. Anti-war protests were fueled by reports of American forces committing atrocities against Vietnamese civilians and a flawed draft process that systematically targeted the poor and working class (Zinn, 2003). Much of the public was divided in terms of their perception of this peace movement. Some viewed the public protests and mass demonstrations as blatant acts of treason while others saw them as a means of citizens countering the power of the federal government. Those who opposed the movement pointed to the infamous “baby killer” chants that were levelled against military servicemen returning home from Vietnam as evidence of treason. The Civil

Rights and peace movements both represented legitimate challenges to long-maintained and deeply warped power structures in American society.

With escalation of US involvement in Vietnam came greater casualties and the first instances of American service members being captured by North Vietnamese (NV) forces. In August 1964, a naval aviator was captured during a bombing run over North Vietnam after his A-4 Skyhawk was shot down by anti-aircraft fire. After parachuting into the Gulf of Tonkin just off the coast and attempting to swim out to open waters, the aviator was picked up by a NV patrol boat and taken to the naval base he had just bombed. The experiences of this first American Prisoner of War (POW) in North Vietnam foreshadowed the poor living conditions to come for many other captured Americans.

Rochester and Kiley (1998) described these early conditions in their account of the history of American POWs in South-East Asia. The first captured airman was interrogated for nearly eight hours each day during the first six weeks of his captivity. His diet consisted of two meals per day of rotten meat and maggot-infested, stale bread. Though he was not subjected to the methods of torture that many later POWs would endure, he was violently ill throughout his captivity and was severely neglected. This aviator was held at the prison fortress of Hoa Lo in Hanoi, the capital of North Vietnam. The infamous prison camp would house numerous American POWs over the war and would eventually earn the facetious moniker of “the Hanoi Hilton.”

Over 700 American service members were captured over the course of the war and many of them spent at least some of their captivity at Hoa Lo. Other camps were built as the need to house more American captives grew, but most of these were no more

than a dozen miles from Hanoi. POWs developed sophisticated systems of communication and resistance and established their own hierarchy of leadership. By the time the US withdrew from the Vietnam War and negotiated the release of American POWs in 1973, some of the repatriated American veterans had endured years of torture and abuse at the hands of their captors (Rochester and Kiley, 1998). All American POWs had experienced powerlessness and abuses of power by dominant captors and, after their captivity was over, were subject to rapidly changing forces in American society.

Theories of Power and Power Dynamics

The fields of psychology and sociology have long struggled to define and operationalize power. Max Weber (1978) famously described power as a finite resource that could be given or taken from one person to another in various settings. Weber's "constant sum" conceptualization provided a useful sociological lens through which to view power as a tangible commodity, as opposed to an abstract and amorphous idea, but it has clear limitations. Chief among these is a lack of recognition of the ability of the individual to generate power from within the self. Viewing power strictly as a concrete resource limits one's ability to explain increases in psychological power.

Steven Lukes (2004) proposed a three-faceted theory of power that addresses different avenues of influence and control in more complex social networks. The first component of power, according to Lukes, is akin to Weber's conceptualization of power as a commodity that can be distributed (or seized) through direct action or policy decisions. His second facet, non-decision making power, is defined in terms of access to information. In this way, power can be exercised by altering the social acceptability of

certain topics of discussion. For example, Lukes would argue that the pervasive stigma surrounding communism as a political system in the United States is the result of dominant factions exercising this second dimension of power to reinforce their own positions. The third facet of Lukes' theory is the concept of ideological power. This can be described as the broad ideological forces that permeate society and cause the dominated to rationalize or even endorse their own submission. Again, there are limitations to the application of Lukes' theory. For example, the third facet of power presumes that all dominated peoples acquiesce to dominant forces and fails to account for individual differences in responses to power imbalance (Dowding, 2006).

Michael Foucault (1980) elaborates on the third dimension of power in his writings on contemporary power theory. He describes how power in institutions is typically developed from the bottom-up as opposed to the more traditional assumption of top-down organizational power. According to Foucault, people within institutions develop values, norms and pools of knowledge as a means of identifying those without power and then weaponizing this imbalance in "truth" to maintain their power. The more these pools of knowledge are regarded as objective and true, the more the power of the harbingers of those pools grows (Bevir & Foucault, 1999). Foucault's theory is also limited in its ability to explain processes of power and power imbalance on a smaller scale. While it does address sweeping patterns of behavior in large institutions at the center of the social order, it cannot be parsimoniously applied to specific instances of power discrepancy, such as that of a prison camp.

Richard Emerson (1962) provided a framework for analyzing microcosms of power imbalance when he proposed his theory of power-dependence relations. His

groundbreaking theory described power in terms of the level of dependence two parties had between each other. For example, if party “A” was dependent on party “B” for a resource that A valued greatly, and party B was, to a similar degree, dependent on party A for a valued resource, then both A and B hold roughly equal power over one another. In other words, A and B have a similarly strong ability to influence the other’s behavior because they both have something that the other needs. According to Emerson’s theory, a power imbalance is created whenever one party becomes less dependent on the other, for any reason. This occurs most commonly when one party finds another source to meet the needs that it previously only found in its relational partner. It is important to note that a power imbalance is only present when one person’s dependence decreases while the other’s remains the same. The concept of a “resource” is intentionally vague so that this framework can be applied to a variety of relationships (social, business, diplomatic, etc.).

Emerson (1962) wrote that power imbalance necessitates a response on the part of the more dependent or weaker party. He theorized that there are four generic responses that can be enacted by the weaker party to restore a degree of balance to the relationship: motivational withdrawal, extension of the power network, coalition formation, and emergence of status. The first of these responses is motivational withdrawal, in which the disadvantaged party becomes less interested in the resource that is provided by the advantaged party. In practice, this strategy might manifest as a cognitive restructuring whereby the disadvantaged party consciously or unconsciously reevaluates the relationship with the advantaged party and chooses to be indifferent regarding the resource held by the advantaged party. This subjective and internal lowering of dependence restores the power balance in the relationship to a rough equilibrium. The

second generic response is labelled extension of the power network, in which the weaker party seeks alternative parties to provide that same resource in an equal (or less imbalanced) relationship. Using the same generic scheme as previously described, if party B is weaker than party A in their power relationship, then party B may seek out party C in an effort to acquire the same resource formerly provided by A, but without the imbalance of power. In this scenario, B has extended its power network by developing a new power relationship with party C.

Response number three is known as coalition formation. As the name implies, this operation occurs when two weaker parties join forces to increase their collective power in a relationship with a stronger party. If A has a clear advantage in its relationship with B and C, then B and C can form a coalition to negotiate with A on more equitable terms. Finally, the fourth response, emergence of status, is utilized to rebalance power within a group setting to reconcile broad power imbalances. Essentially, an imbalanced group will create status rewards (money, ego-inflation, respect, privileges, etc.) to entice valuable members to remain part of the group. This is based on the assumption that the most valuable members of any group typically have the least to gain by being part of the group and, thus, have the lowest dependency on the group relative to other members. Conversely, the least valued members of a group benefit more from membership (using money as an example, the person with the lowest initial capital stands to benefit the most from pooling resources with richer investors) and, therefore, are more dependent on the group than the group is on them. Without the benefit of status rewards, highly valued group members retain a disproportionate amount of power and could theoretically throw the group into chaos, either by abusing their power for great personal gain or by

withdrawing from the group altogether. To understand this balancing action in a group setting, the concept of power balance must be redefined in the context of group dynamics. Emerson argues that a power-balanced group is not one in which every member of the group retains the same level of power; rather, it is a group in which every member is dependent on the group to the same degree that they are valued by the group. For example, if a five-point Likert scale for dependence and value were used to measure a power-balanced group with four members, then the most valued member would have a dependence score of 5 and a value score of 5. The least valued member in that same group would have a dependence score of 2 and a value score of 2. These values are often self-balancing as lower ranking members of the group engage in motivation withdrawal to reduce their psychological valuation of the benefits of the group, just as the group has assessed them at a lower value than other group members.

Prison Power Dynamics and Their Influencing Factors

American Prisoners of War in Vietnam were, by definition, prisoners and, as such, understanding how power functions in domestic prisons may shed light on the behaviors and interactions described by POWs.

Institutional Factors

One common area of discussion regarding distribution of power in prisons is the so-called problem of legitimacy. In the context of power dynamics, legitimacy is the belief of those without power in the validity of those who hold authority over them. (Beetham, 1991). Domestic prisons operate with obvious and dramatic power imbalances

between prison guards and inmates but only in the past few decades has legitimacy been studied in the prison context. Sparks and Bottoms (1995) argued for the importance of considering legitimacy of authority when discussing interactions between guards and inmates. They also pointed out that there are several methods by which guard legitimacy can be established including strict authoritarianism and relationship formation. It has been demonstrated that oppressed groups are more likely to resist authority when they view that authority as illegitimate and unstable (Haslam & Reicher, 2007).

Person-level Factors

Power within groups of prisoners is influenced by numerous person-level factors. One prominent finding is that length of incarceration is often correlated with the perceived power and influence of specific inmates (Kreager et al., 2017). In essence, the longer an inmate has been in prison, the more likely he is to be viewed as influential and powerful. Kreager and colleagues explain that length of incarceration may act as a substitute for increased knowledge in the minds of newer prisoners. Additional factors including replaceability, access to specialized information or resources and sociability also play a role in determining how much power an inmate has in the prison hierarchy (Sidanius, Liu, & Pratto, 1994).

Power Dynamics Among Prisoners of War

Currently, there is a dearth of qualitative and quantitative research regarding power dynamics among POWs. Literature regarding POWs is heavily focused on specific psychological and physical health outcomes (see Sutker & Allain, 1996; Nice, Garland,

Hilton, Baggett, & Mitchell, 1996), but some resources have been dedicated to social and psychological factors within POW camps. Previous research has indicated that specific coping styles among POWs in Vietnam did not significantly predict morbidity of psychological disorders upon repatriation (Ursano, Wheatley, Sledge, Rahe, & Carlson, 1986). This study aimed to fill this gap in the current literature by exploring perceived power dynamics among POWs and their captors.

CHAPTER TWO

METHOD

Participants

This qualitative study included 16 Vietnam POW veterans who served in the USA Army (n = 1), Air Force (n = 11), Marines (n = 1), or Navy (n = 3 and) and one civilian (n = 1). All 16 POWs were white males, had completed a four-year degrees and were officers at the time of their capture. The length of their captivity in North Vietnam ranged from 101 to 2871 days ($M = 1559$ days, $SD = 935$ days).

Procedures

Participants were recruited for this study via snowball sampling, word-of-mouth and through military contacts organized by the primary interviewer, a retired Navy chaplain. Semi-structured interviews were conducted in-person, in the homes or offices of the interviewees, and both audio and video recordings were taken of each session in its entirety. Typically, interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. Participants were asked questions regarding their experiences in captivity, their attitudes towards their captors, factors that influenced their reintegration during their repatriation and how their views and attitudes may have changed over time. Questions asked by the interviewer included “What was your initial attitude towards your captors?” “Have your attitudes towards your captors changed in the decades since [the end of the war]?” and “What about your experience as a POW do you believe has most impacted your life?” The interviewer

asked probing questions to clarify ideas presented by interviewees. After all interviews were completed, they were transcribed verbatim.

Qualitative Analysis

This study adopted phenomenological and grounded theory approaches to explore the responses of American POWs to drastic imbalances in power during their captivity. A phenomenological approach to qualitative analysis requires that data be coded line-by-line and emphasizes comparing experiences of members of a group in an effort describe the nature of a given phenomenon (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Grounded theory allows identified themes and trends in the data to inform the analytic process through the creation of a flexible system of coding that evolves as ideas and concepts recur in interviews (Charmaz, 2006). See Figure 1 for an overview of the dual phenomenological and grounded-theory analysis.

Interviews were initially individually coded (by two graduate students and one faculty member at Loma Linda University) for broad themes and concepts identified by the interviewer. Following the initial coding of each interview, researchers wrote memos and had discussions comparing and contrasting themes. Collaboration among researchers in this analysis was critical because the cross-referencing of memos and themes is necessary to approach qualitative data saturation (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Charmaz, 2006). Early categories of codes used by the coding team included POW attitudes towards adversity, attitudes towards their captors, values in life, and coping mechanisms in prison and when returning home. In accordance with the grounded theory recommendations of Kathy Charmaz (2006), additional codes were added over time as

new themes emerged during the coding process in order to reflect common topics addressed by POWs.

Next, a round of focused coding was conducted in which the coding team pooled their analyses and memos to further identify emergent themes present across all the data. Finally, a round of axial coding was conducted with an emphasis on the sensitizing concept of POW perceptions of power imbalances related to how POWs coped with these power discrepancies (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Researcher Biases

In qualitative analyses, there is significant risk of researcher bias influencing study findings. It is critical to acknowledge these biases as a means of mitigating (i.e. bracketing) their potential impact on any analysis. When this study began, I imagined that these POWs would be predominantly elderly white men. I also believed that their lengths of captivity would likely be at least several years and that most of them would have been tortured by their captors. Furthermore, I assumed that many of them would harbor lasting hatred towards their captors and that they would demonstrate prominent symptoms of Post-traumatic Stress Disorder. It was also my assumption that most of these POWs would be categorically against psychotherapy or talking about their experiences more broadly. Finally, I believed that these POWs likely faced significant public backlash when they returned home from Vietnam.

Clinical Importance

The Vietnam War claimed the lives 58, 318 American service members between 1964 and 1973. Reports vary as to how many Vietnamese service members and civilians were killed in that span but conservative estimates put the figure at nearly 1,000,000 dead. Over the course of the war, nearly 800 American service members, mostly airmen, were captured alive by North Vietnamese combatants. At the war's end, 684 American Prisoners of War (POWs) were returned safely to the United States. Upon returning home, these men faced enormous psychological, physical and social challenges. These same challenges continue to plague these same men as well as countless other veterans and POWs in the subsequent four decades. Studying and understanding the specific circumstances that Vietnam POWs faced and how they responded may shed light on how and why these struggles persist and how they can be mitigated in the future.

POWs are unique in the military community in that they face prolonged combat-related stressors, but are rendered nearly powerless to defend themselves. Given the prevalence of psychological and physical health problems among returning POWs (see Sutker & Allain, 1996; Nice, Garland, Hilton, Baggett, & Mitchell, 1996), understanding how POWs responded to this experience of perceived powerlessness may be critical in appropriately tailoring their treatment during repatriation. With greater understanding of power dynamics, clinicians may be able to target specific negative schemas or behavioral patterns and provide context for them. Military chaplains could potentially incorporate this understanding of power dynamics into their methods of support for POWs and veterans. By providing an explanation for unusual behavior, awareness of power dynamics has the potential to reduce any shame experienced by POWs regarding tactics

or attitudes they adopted during captivity. On a broader scale, studying power may help POWs to better navigate current power dynamics in their places of employment, in the military or veteran community, and in their relationships. Finally, understanding power and powerlessness could have implications for how service members are trained. Perhaps the military could use such information to help new service members understand and be prepared for the specific psychological rigors of powerlessness in captivity.

CHAPTER THREE

FINDINGS

Following analysis of the 16 POWs, five emergent themes were identified as ways of resisting the inherent prison camp power imbalance: 1) Communication: The Lifeline, 2) Connection: The Old Friendship Thing, 3) Heroic Leadership, 4) Establishing Our Routines and 5) Honor and Loyalty.

Communication: The Lifeline

One commonly mentioned tool of resistance for POWs was to form and maintain tight-knit groups of support and communication. Numerous POWs described their reliance on their fellow captured servicemen to resist their captors' attempts at extracting information. "James" (Interviewee #13), who spent 6.49 years in captivity, described the central role communication played in surviving the harsh camp conditions:

"...The lifeline as I am concerned to surviving a difficult situation... is communication, and we were fanatics at communication. We did unbelievable things in communication."

"Matt" (Interviewee #2), who was spent 5.39 years in a POW camp, noted that the North Vietnamese recognized the value of and attempted to disrupt POW communication. Camp organizers used different forms of isolation to divide and systematically breakdown POWs. Matt described their tactics and the impact these methods had on POWs:

"Unfortunately some of the POWs who did not communicate who [were] isolated suffered mentally. Which you do if you're in total solitary confinement. They became more cooperative. That's why they kept us so long in solitary or one or

two or three to a room, is for that reason. They knew if they keep people separate they can't organize and they can't resist."

Isolation posed a serious threat to POW resistance but they developed creative and sophisticated methods of communication to remain connected to one another. POWs developed a system of coded taps (referred to as the "tap code" by the group) that was distinct from Morse code and allowed POWs to communicate simple messages through cell walls and across prison hallways. "Jacob" (Interviewee #8), who was interned for 7.87 years, described their secretive communication in this manner:

"And it was just so important that we communicate, number one, and number two, that we had a standard system that you'd go to any camp... Everyone wanted to use the tap code. We recognized the importance of communication..."

Connection: The Old Friendship Thing

POWs often described their reliance on one another to distract themselves from the monotony and limitations of prison camp life and to process the complexities of their shared traumatic experience. Many hours of imprisonment were spent talking about memories of home, recollections of violent capture and hopes for life after repatriation. Take, for example, the following statement by "Luke" (Interviewee #14), who spent 5.54 years imprisoned:

"I believe what we were doing in those cells... was like group therapy. Because... we were locked up 24/7. We can talk about anything we want to, and we did. And so what in essence we did for the last couple years there was process everything, over and over and over again."

Matt (Interviewee #2) noted the value of friendships developed during his time as a POW. Such friendships developed amidst tremendous stress and suffering provided brief reprieves from the chaos of imprisonment. While describing a reunion with several

fellow POWs after repatriation, Matt made the following statement regarding what helped him survive his time in captivity:

“You know it was... the old friendship thing and the comfort of the very close relationship that we had developed by our time in prison.”

Heroic Leadership

Another method POWs used to take back some measure of power from their captors was the establishment of an internal hierarchy, which was based on length of imprisonment as opposed to traditional military rank. Those who had been in camp longer passed along critical information about communication, how to endure captivity and torture and how structure time in prison. “Oscar” (Interviewee #4), who was imprisoned for 0.75 years, described the importance of “the bullpen” or those who sat atop this hierarchy:

“All these guys that were leaders and went through so many years... those are the heroes... Those are the kind of guys I thought were heroes. You know, being in the same room with them was pretty awesome and people would lump us into that group... But it's still just not the same, never will be, and it shouldn't be. I find that.. if it weren't for those guys, we wouldn't have probably come out of there with the honor we came out with.”

Other POWs pointed to their leaders as the primary reason that they were not abused even further during their imprisonment. Many POW leaders endured extensive torture during their imprisonment but they established a precedent that most POWs would not break while being tortured. Consequently, newer POWs were tortured far less than older POW leaders. “Bruce” (Interviewee #5; 5.8 years) relayed the protective impact POW leaders had in the following statement:

“They stood between us and North Vietnamese for all those years and they... weren't there for any other reason. That's what God said He wanted them to do for

a period of time, but it was an extended period of time: you know six, seven years...”

Establishing Our Routine

Another common strategy for maintaining resistance against their captors was for POWs to develop group and individual routines. These daily regimented experiences helped POWs to distract themselves, maintain some level of physical activity and feel a sense of connectedness to one another and to their home. Many POWs reflected on the value of group-wide routines and their impact on prison camp morale. James (Interviewee #13), described this routine while discussing the leadership and advice of one of the most experienced POWs:

“He wanted everybody on Sunday, after the meal to get up and say the Lords prayer together, and then he wanted everybody to turn toward the United States where ever we might be, solitary or whatever and say the Pledge of Allegiance... then he wants everybody to exercise on a regular basis. Well, you know that didn't sound too bad... After our meals, we'd all stand up and would say the Lord's Prayer. And as time went by, we found other ways of expressing our faith... but most of them through the Lord's prayer, particularly on the holidays, but the Pledge of Allegiance really was kind of a shot in the arm. It was really good to say that and to hear other people saying it.”

Other POWs developed personal routines that helped them distract themselves and maintain some level of physical fitness. Such routines often included scheduled times for exercise, thinking about home and daydreaming. “Hank” (Interviewee #7), who spent 175 days (.48 years) as a POW in North Vietnam, described his development of a personal routine like this:

“I decided I would organize my day mentally. And I just set out and decided I'd do an hour exercising in the morning. Or even when I woke up early I might allow myself to go back home mentally. And then I would do my exercises, and I

would a schedule during the day to think of things...Any specific thing I could think about, but I would schedule it as to when I did it.”

Honor and Loyalty

A key principle of resistance described by numerous interviewees was remaining loyal to the United States Military and loyal to their fellow POWs – especially when pressured by their North Vietnamese captors. Many POWs discussed their commitment to “not give them anything” regarding militarily useful information and to not accept rewards dangled by camp administrators (which included being released to American officials). This principle was exemplified clearly in an anecdote shared by Clark” (Interviewee #10), a POW for 4.86 years:

“On one occasion I was being tortured and they were asking me about the airplane and that was the last thing I wanted to talk to them about... And the question they wanted an answer to was: how fast does it go? Well if they knew it at a certain speed, then the [North Vietnamese anti-aircraft] gunners learn to lead, and I wasn't going to give that away. So I said ‘fast,’ and I got knocked out on to the floor for that one.”

This principle of loyalty to one another and refusal of Vietnamese bribery was also demonstrated in POW attitudes towards those who did not uphold this standard of resistance. Those who broke solidarity with their comrades and cooperated with their captors were often rejected and labeled “weak”. “James” (Interviewee #13) discussed his perceptions of several POWs who worked with NV prison officials and described them in this manner:

“The Vietnamese had a group of ‘weak sisters’ that they used for anybody that came to the Red Cross or anybody that came in. They got the same group of guys that were people that were vying to go home early... We called them ‘weak sisters.’ And they were weak in their own right.”

While loyalty among POWs was a highly revered value, there were moments when other principles were placed above remaining in solidarity with one another. In one instance, a veteran managed to memorize the names of several hundred of his fellow POWs and was instructed by POW leadership to accept an offer from the North Vietnamese to return home. Clark describes the process of convincing him to return to the US like this:

“...The senior ranking officer... a Lieutenant Colonel, told... Doug ‘if he is offered a chance to go home, take it.’ Well, Doug did *not* want to do that. He said that the code of conduct won't let [him] do that. And my own set of honor won't let me do that. It took months to persuade Doug that a bigger goal would be met if he goes home than if he stays there. And the goal was to get the names out, because most of us [newer POWs] were being held ‘incommunicado’ and our fate was quite literally unknown to our families.”

CHAPTER FOUR

DISCUSSION

A qualitative study, utilizing a dual phenomenological and grounded theory approach, was conducted to explore how prisoners of war coped with power imbalances. In total, 16 American POWs from the Vietnam War were interviewed and asked questions about their experiences with and attitudes towards their captors, other POWs and returning home after the war. There were five emergent themes identified which described how POWs managed the stark power discrepancy between them and their captors: 1) Communication: The Lifeline, 2) Connection: The Old Friendship Thing, 3) Heroic Leadership, 4) Establishing Our Routines and 5) Honor and Loyalty. These five themes were mapped onto Emerson's theory of power-dependence (1962). See Table 1 below for a summary. At present, there are almost no studies on power dynamics between prisoners of war and their captors. This study is one of the first to explore these dynamics beyond the anecdotal descriptions of the POWs themselves.

Communication: The Lifeline

The use of communication was absolutely critical for POWs in their day-to-day struggle to survive. Verbal exchanges in cramped cells and whispered words of encouragement while being escorted through prison hallways were vital to POW coordinated resistance. Officials in the North Vietnamese (NV) camp administration recognized the threat this type of collaboration presented and they sought to smother any channels of viable communication among POWs. Stints in solitary confinement cells

Table 1. Emergent POW Themes and Corresponding Power-Dependence Equivalent(s).

<u>Emergent Theme</u>	<u>Power-Dependence Equivalent(s)</u>
<i>Communication: the Lifeline</i>	Coalition Formation
<i>Connection: the Old Friendship Thing</i>	Coalition Formation
<i>Heroic Leadership</i>	Emergence of Status
<i>Establishing Our Routine</i>	Coalition Formation
	Emergence of Status
	Extension of the Power Network
<i>Honor and Loyalty</i>	Emergence of Status
	Extension of the Power Network

were commonplace and the NV officers isolated any POW who emerged as leaders. “Tap Code” was developed by early POWs to communicate through cell walls and across longer distances without alerting any guards to forbidden conversations. This code was passed down from the earliest POWs to those who were captured after them, leading to the eventual widespread use of a standardized Tap Code throughout the network of North Vietnamese prison camps. POW ingenuity allowed for the flow of continuous support and distraction which directly challenged the NV objectives of dividing POWs and trapping them in their own suffering.

Use of communication by POWs to reclaim some measure of power while imprisoned can be described using an element of Emerson’s theory of power-dependence relations (1962): coalition formation. The coalition formation strategy describes the building of alliances among weaker parties to balance the power relationship with the

stronger party. This was in essence what POWs were doing when they communicated with one another. They were able to coordinate their resistance and exercise some measure of power over the valuable resource of strategic information that they withheld from their captors. Communication allowed POWs to share information about questions captors were asking and to provide suggested defenses based on their individual experiences. It also facilitated the processing of trauma, the building of friendships, the exchange of words of support and distraction from the monotony of years of imprisonment.

The theme of communication can also be viewed in the greater context of the Vietnam War. American POWs were generally unable to communicate with their loved ones back home which likely induced significant anxiety amongst their families and friends. The lack of communication between the United States and its communist counterparts Russia and China ensured that a proxy war between two ideologies would come to dominate over a decade of Vietnamese history. Indeed, the seeds of the Vietnam War were sown by the disconnect and the lack of discussion between factions in the North and South.

Connection: The Old Friendship Thing

As is often observed in military settings, POWs developed many powerful friendships with one another and used these connections as means of coping with the traumas and trials of imprisonment by a foreign power. With little else to occupy their time, POWs talked often with their cellmates about their homes, their hopes, their favorite foods, their families and the first things they would do once they were free. Some

traded stories of capture and of the injuries, emotional or physical, they received while being shot out of the skies above North Vietnam. The deep, empathetic and familiar nature of POW friendships stood in stark contrast to the cold, violent and foreign interactions with guards.

Just as communication allowed POWs to resist the will of their captors, friendship eased the immense psychological weight of life in a POW camp. POWs clung to one another in the absence of their domestic friends and family. Some of them spent countless days seeking the catharsis of open verbal expression to friends in camp who understood the pain of near powerlessness. The formation of friendship coalitions gave POWs a tool to block the primary objective of their captors: the erosion of each individual's willpower to force cooperation with propaganda and strategic information extraction efforts. Through friendship POWs were able to combat the boredom of imprisonment, the emotional strain of regular torture and abuse and the looming threat of hopelessness.

Personal connections played a central role to many parties in the Vietnam War. When fighting broke out between Northern and Southern forces, families became divided along political and geographic lines. In the US, families were split based on support or dissent for the war effort. Service members on both sides leaned heavily on the most proximal members of their unit and developed profound friendships that motivated them in their darkest moments. Even the lack of personal connection displayed by the US, Chinese and Russian governments in their dealings with Vietnam impacted the extent to which each side committed resources and manpower to the war. Counterintuitively, connections were formed between POWs and some of the kinder prison guards. The formation of connections was vital to the survival of many civilians and service members.

Heroic Leadership

The earliest POWs who were captured by the NV forces did much to establish norms among later POWs and to set expectations for behavior when interacting with captors. These leaders faced frequent interrogations and extensive physical and psychological torture at the hands of captors seeking to mine them for relevant military information. Their resistance was a point of inspiration for newly captured Americans and they provided guidance to all those they could communicate with. POW leaders were charged with transmitting critical survival knowledge to each new wave of Americans who were captured. Each leader's individual heroic resistance helped protect other POWs through sharing lessons learned and inspiring collective group resistance, both of which ran counter to the concerted efforts of NV guards to isolate and divide.

According to Emerson, emergence of status describes any strategy in which an internal hierarchy is established within a group to strengthen the power of the group as a whole. POW leaders were viewed by other Americans in prison camps as mentors and sources of hope. In essence, the most valued members of the POW hierarchy exchanged encouragement, leadership and support for the social reward of respect. They bore a disproportionately heavy burden relative to other POWs (especially those who arrived towards the end of the war) and so they were treated with disproportionately enthusiastic respect and reverence by those lower on the hierarchy. They also established a standard set of rules for the valuation of new POWs. That set of rules marked those who resisted interrogation and who did not cooperate with captors as highly valued members of the group and those who provided information to captors as relatively devalued members.

Themes of leadership (with varying degrees of heroism) permeated the causes and the course of the Vietnam War. The war machine came to life when a hero of the Vietnamese Revolution against French rule, Ho Chi Minh, rallied his allies and applied pressure to President Diem in the South. Diem refused to honor his duty as a self-described democratic leader to hold free and fair elections. Prison camp administrators used their authority and influence to actively suppress POWs who displayed leadership qualities. Leaders among foreign democratic and communist nations made decisions that they believed would best support their ideological factions in the region but seemed to care little for the will of the people of Vietnam.

Establishing Our Routine

Life in a North Vietnamese Prisoner-of-War camp did not afford many opportunities for a sense of agency in one's life. Building routines, individually and as a group, provided a small measure of control and a limited sense of power that was rare behind the fences of a prison camp. POWs created routines filled with physical exercise and imaginal retreats. They set schedules for group discussions and camp-wide prayers. There were weekly acts of patriotism such as facing in the direction of the United States and reciting the *Pledge of Allegiance*. Some POWs mentally sketched out their memoirs or developed a list of things they planned to do when they returned home. Most of these activities were bound by a tight schedule that was respected by their friends and cellmates and that would only be disturbed by intrusions by captors for interrogation or propaganda creation. Despite the almost constant chaos and overwhelming

helplessness invoked by prolonged imprisonment by the NV, POWs carefully crafted routines to provide order and a small amount of control over a portion of their lives.

The establishing of routines can be classified as a form of coalition formation and emergence of status but it also serves as a prime example of extension of the power network. The latter strategy as described by Emerson occurs when one party finds an alternative source of a key resource and thus, they become less dependent on the original provider of said resource. In the context of POWs in North Vietnam, the key resource that camp administrators tried to control was agency itself. One purpose of operating a POW camp is to remove all sense of agency from the camp's prisoners to engender feelings of reliance and, ultimately, compliance. By building personal and group routines, POWs created a new source of agency and thus reduced the power imbalance between them and their captors.

The search for agency cannot be separated from this period of history. After suffering under colonial rule, North Vietnamese forces fought for the right to choose their own leaders. Government forces in South Vietnam fought to defend themselves from an invasion of former allies. Communist and democratic foreign powers supplied both sides of the conflict with the intention of imposing their preferred system of government on the people of Vietnam. Even the American homeland was subject to a dramatic movement of citizens demanding that African-Americans be guaranteed the same choices and freedoms as all other Americans.

Honor and Loyalty

The principles of honor and loyalty factor heavily into valuations of POWs by the collective group. As it applies to POWs during the Vietnam War, honor could be described as a status one achieves by upholding established group expectations and loyalty as a virtue one maintains by protecting the other members of the group. In other words, a POW had honor if he resisted his captors, communicated regularly with other POWs and provided moral support for those undergoing torture or abuse. A POW was loyal to his fellow prisoners and to the United States if he refused to aid his captors by disclosing information about other POWs and US military assets or by agreeing to participate in propaganda campaigns. This loyalty flew in defiance of the NV officers' goal of manipulating POWs to abandon their group in exchange for individual relief.

As was already discussed, resisting one's captors improved one's standing in the group. This indicates that honor and loyalty can be classified within the emergence of status strategy. The more loyal and honorable a POW was perceived to be, the more status and respect he held among his peers. These social rewards were powerful motivators in a prison network with little capital beyond group standing. Loyalty to the United States may also represent a form of extension of the power network. Another abstract resource that captors aim to withhold from their prisoners is purpose. If a POW has no sense of purpose in his resistance, then he will likely cooperate out of self-preservation. A POW who has an external motivation that drives his resistance is a POW who is unlikely to relent. Many Americans held captive in North Vietnam drew strength from the idea that their resistance would keep other Americans on the frontlines of central and South Vietnam safe. The less information North Vietnamese forces had, the more

difficult it would be for them to harm American service members. POWs found another source of purpose in remaining loyal to the US which lessened the imbalance of their power relationship with their captors.

The principles of honor and loyalty are present throughout the global participants of the Vietnam War. Loyalty to one's side was valued greatly by every faction and was often used as a measure of a person's social value. There was likely more debate on what actions were considered honorable. For example, POWs who resisted their captors were viewed as honorable via an American lens. North Vietnamese officers may have measured honor in terms of their ability to extract information from POWs. The United States demanded total loyalty of its POWs just as North Vietnam demanded of its prison guards and officers. This demand caused significant strain for some POWs when they were confronted with American anti-war protestors (some POWs reported members of their own families had joined the peace movement). Many POWs felt that these protestors had violated the principle of loyalty by actively opposing the actions of the US military.

Absence of Motivational Withdrawal

One component of Emerson's power-dependence theory that was conspicuously absent from the emergent themes described by POWs was the motivational withdrawal strategy. Motivational withdrawal refers to psychological changes in the weaker party's valuations of a resource controlled by the stronger party such that the weaker party subjectively desire the resource less. In other words, if a party decides they do not want a resource, they are less dependent on the other party who controls that resource.

There are several possible explanations for the lack of apparent motivational withdrawal. One possibility is that the resources included in this interaction (freedom for POWs and information for NV guards) were too valuable to discard. All POWs desired freedom and it was unlikely that there would be any psychological reduction in this desire over the course of captivity. Many POWs did, however, sacrifice personal freedoms and privileges for the sake of protecting information that was valuable to the group. Additionally, they found an alternative source of control in their created group routines. Another explanation might be that the unusual nature of the relationship between POW and captor impacted the availability of this strategy. In typical prison settings, prisoners have no obvious resources to barter with when interacting with prison officials. Americans in North Vietnamese prison camps had technical, strategic and military knowledge that NV officers desperately wanted to acquire. POWs having a valuable resource of their own that they could leverage against their captors may have served as a balancing force for the power struggle between the two parties. Since neither side was willing to cede their resource, the value of both control and information could not be reduced.

Notable Relationships Among Strategies

Many of the strategies described in the words of POWs and in Emerson's power-dependence theory integrate elements of other strategies into their frameworks. Take for example the large overlap and interdependence of friendship and communication. The development of strong personal connections gave POWs greater resolve to remain loyal to the US military but only because they were able to communicate verbally and through

the tap code. Similarly, having strong leaders may not have raised POW morale quite so significantly if these leaders were unable to overcome their isolation and use the tap code to transmit words of support to newer POWs. This same channel of encoded information allowed leaders to organize camp-wide activities (including prayers, exercise routines and group discussions) that promoted group unity and loyalty to the US. The perceived level of a POW's loyalty was then used as the primary unit of measurement for their value to the group and their social status. POW leaders were the most loyal because they resisted most emphatically and so they were regarded by the group as being on a higher tier than the average prisoner of war. Those who cooperated with NV captors were labeled as traitors and were relegated to the bottom tier of the camp hierarchy (POWs would often justify the actions of their captors as products of their government but they had no justification for Americans who gave information to camp officials).

In the Context of Current Literature

The findings of this study align with many facets of past research on prisoners and the influence of power and POWs. First, POWs' broad and persistent efforts to resist their captors seem to support the work of Beetham (1991) on the importance of legitimacy in power dynamics. POWs almost unanimously rejected the legitimacy of the power held by North Vietnamese officers and guards. Their reasons may have varied (a disdain for communism, witnessing or experiencing torture and abuse or a resolution that North Vietnam is "the enemy") but their resolve did not. This broad practice of the group to deny the legitimacy of NV power and authority did seem to galvanize the American POWs in their resistance, just as Haslam & Reicher's (2007) conclusions suggested.

Second, these findings supported the assertion by Kreager et al. (2017) that prisoners who have spent more time imprisoned are generally viewed as more powerful by their peers. According to the descriptions of the POWs in this study, positions of leadership were generally allocated based on who had the most experience in the prison camp and newer POWs often adopted the attitudes and behaviors of those who had been captured before them.

Implications

The five themes identified in this study may have implications for clinicians, military administrators and domestic prison officials who work with persons that have experienced a prolonged loss of control. Understanding how POWs may have coped with the constant imbalance of power with their captors may give clinicians insight on how to more effectively frame treatment exercises. For example, a clinician working with a POW could consider emphasizing social connections with other POWs in addition to general practices of building social support. They could also recommend that the POW develop a daily routine of activities to increase their sense of control and agency in their lives. Clinicians could also help POWs explore their personal beliefs regarding honor and loyalty which may open up channels to attack cognitive distortions related to “dishonorable” actions. Military administrators may draw on the lessons of this study to develop stronger training programs for service members prior to deployment. In the future, Survival School could include recommendations that POWs make every effort to communicate, develop personal connections, appoint leaders to rally behind, build routines and foster a sense of group loyalty to the United States. These strategies may

help captured service members resist their captors with greater determination and carve out some sense of control in what can only be a chaotic and traumatic experience. Domestic prison officials may draw upon these findings in order to create a more peaceful environment that respects the dignity of the incarcerated. Officials could choose to create

Study Limitations

While this study was able to explore relatively novel areas of POW experience, it has many limitations that must be acknowledged. First, this study was conducted based on the retrospective reflections of POWs who were repatriated over 40 years ago. It is likely that some of their recollections of events or details were inaccurate due to the imperfect nature of human memory. Future studies could consider exploring the use of first-hand military debriefing reports that were created as a matter of procedure when POWs returned home. Second, these findings, while applicable to the experiences of POWs since the Vietnam War, are tied to a specific set of historical circumstances. There were nearly 800 POWs captured throughout the Vietnam War, most of whom were held captive in a small system of prison camps around the city of Hanoi. No war or conflict that the US military has participated in since Vietnam has had more than 50 POWs (Klein, Wells & Somers, 2006). There are many questions about the significance of group size and captor traits in predicting how veterans might respond to power imbalances that cannot be answered by this study. As these questions are not addressed, one must be cautious when applying any conclusions of these findings to the idiosyncrasies of other POWs' experiences in different wars. Finally, due to the advanced age of much of the

Vietnam POW population (in addition to their relative scarcity among military veterans), it may be difficult to replicate this study with a similar group of veterans.

Conclusions

While all people face situations in which there is an imbalance in power, relatively few have endured the grossly lopsided power relationship found in 20th century Prisoner-of-War camps. American POWs held during Vietnam War in prison camps surrounding the city of Hanoi were tortured, abused, starved, isolated and interrogated by their North Vietnamese Army captors and they had almost nothing to leverage for their own safety. When confronted with such a bleak and smothering power dynamic, these POWs developed methods to cope with this discrepancy in power. The 16 POWs interviewed for this study described five different strategies for leveling out (to some degree) the distribution of control: 1) Communication: The Lifeline, 2) Connection: The Old Friendship Thing, 3) Heroic Leadership, 4) Establishing Our Routines and 5) Honor and Loyalty. These strategies had three theoretical counterparts in Emerson's theory of power-dependence relations (1962): 1) Coalition Formation, 2) Emergence of Status and 3) Extension of the Power Network. Many of these strategies overlapped and were interdependent on one another to function beneficially for the POW group. Collectively communication, friendship, leadership, routine and loyalty allowed POWs to mount a formidable resistance, protect the militarily valuable information they possessed and exercise a measure of control over their own lives despite their imprisonment. The emergence of these strategies parallels in many ways the broader international dynamics of geopolitical power that dominated this period in history. Confrontations of POW vs.

captor mirrored the struggle of North vs. South, Democracy vs. Communism and the United States vs. Russia and China.

The findings of this study may benefit clinical, military and domestic correctional settings, as they provide clues on how discrepancies in power shape experiences, perceptions, and outcomes for those locked in weaker positions. Future studies could examine the extent to which group size, captor traits and specific circumstances of imprisonment may affect methods of challenging imbalanced power dynamics. More research needs to be conducted with this population while they remain alive and available to share their harrowing experiences. Their numbers dwindle every year and there may never be another group of US veterans large enough to explore these questions with.

Despite all of the challenges these men faced, they were remarkably resilient and they battled to overcome the trauma of their capture. These men came to understand something important about confronting the tremendous demons unleashed by war: “the terror can't follow you; the memories can follow you and the memory of the terror can follow you, but... it can't hurt anymore, at least not in the same way.”

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