



Individual power in human motivation – Review and theoretical perspective

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ABSTRACT

There are many studies in Psychology and other sciences about the concept of power. We believe that individual power is one of the most critical factors in human motivation, which is considered by prominent motivation theories, like Choice Theory or McClelland's Human Motivation Theory. This paper aims to study the concept of power, considering ego and social orientation. The extensive literature review allowed us to describe the concepts related to those orientations and to induce a theoretical model that may typify and explain the relationships between the two perspectives of power. The model might contribute to describing four motivational profiles, namely the imperator, with high ego-power and power over others orientation; the supporter, with low ego-power and power with other orientation; the leader, with high ego-power and power with others orientation; and the controller, with low ego-power and power over others orientation. The Ego-Social Power Motivation Model could help describe the power signature of an individual. This individual picture might help psychologists work on motivations, attitudes, and behaviours to enhance people's lives and well-being.

1. Introduction

Human motivation is a traditional topic in psychological studies (Franken, 2007). Many theories try to explain human motivation concerning different contexts. As important examples, among many other motivation theories, we can mention the Drive Reduction Motivation Theory, which defends that one needs to reduce physiological or psychological imbalances related to motivation drives (e.g., thirst, hunger, need for heat), i.e., the needs or wants stemming from a disruption in homeostasis (Hull, 1943, 1952). Related to Drive Reduction theory, there is the Arousal theory, which highlights the need from individuals to maintain their own optimal level of arousal. For example, when we are overly excited, we look for calming and relaxing activities; when we get bored, we look for more invigorating activities. The needs for achievement, power, and affiliation would be motivated by a desire to reduce one's arousal levels (Murray, 1938). Another motivation theory is the Influence of Rewards and Punishments, for instance, related to financial incentives, recognition, or the threat of negative consequences. Individuals are motivated to engage in activities that they believe will lead to pleasurable outcomes and avoid activities associated with negative outcomes (Skinner, 1938). Other approach to motivation relies

on Social and Cultural Influences, i.e., the expectations, norms, and values of one's culture and social environment that can shape what individuals consider motivating and how they pursue their goals. The roots of Socio-cultural theory is attributed to the Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky (1896–1934) and his collaborators (Cole et al., 1978). A motivation theory with great impact in management was the Goal Setting Theory, which defends the establishment of clear and specific objectives to enhance motivation. This theory emphasizes the importance of setting goals based on the following principles: clarity, challenge, commitment, feedback, and task complexity (Locke, 1968). These principles were applied to the well-known management tool called S.M.A.R.T. (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound) goals (Doran, 1981).

People may have different motivations and orientations concerning their underlying attitudes and goals (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Many definitions of human motivation point out a close relationship with goal-achievement or an orientation conducive to action (e.g., Brophy, 2010; Schunk et al., 2014). Nevertheless, we can be motivated without a pre-defined course of action, goal, or purpose, being more a feeling or drive to our behaviour that leads us to do something that does not have a forecasted specific end (e.g., Barrett, 2020; Higgins, 2006). This problem

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can be solved if we add the notions of conscious or unconscious motivations, restoring the existence of an end-directed behaviour motivation in all situations. For example, [Webb and Sheeran \(2006\)](#), in their meta-analysis about experimental studies of the intention-behaviour link, concluded that intentions have an essential effect on behaviour, but nonconscious processes like habits and impulses limit their influence. Moreover, exchange-oriented persons link power with self-interest goals, whereas community-oriented persons associate power with social responsibility goals, and these power-goal effects can occur non-consciously ([Chen et al., 2001](#)). These findings are consistent with automatic self-regulation research and show that the unconscious processes activate cognitive structures created in the context of previous experiences in similar situations ([Papies, 2016](#)). These life experiences can be framed on the social environment's impact in shaping behaviour, knowledge acquisition, self-regulation, and individual goals and expectations of outcomes, which is predicted by [Bandura \(1986\)](#). Thus, the motivation processes may include a volitional action (e.g., "I want to do... something"), depicted by an internal perceived locus of causality or autonomous motivation, or a non-volitional action (e.g., "I have to do... something"), depicted by an external perceived locus of causality or controlled motivation factors, both based on an internal locus of control that predicts that "I can do... something" ([Howard et al., 2017](#)).

Self-determination theory ([Deci & Ryan, 1985](#)), one of the most prominent theories of motivation, defended that performance differences and the outcomes' well-being can be related to a continuous spectrum comprising extrinsic and intrinsic motivations that are based on the satisfaction of the psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. This theory also allows the exploration of motivation at different levels: situational, related to specific events; contextual, related to specific behaviours; or, at a global level, related to personality tendencies ([Ryan & Deci, 2002](#)), which is our specific goal with this paper. All these psychological needs ([Ryan & Deci, 2017](#)) could be related to internal and external sources of influence on behaviour.

Self-determination is also the motivation related to the ability to make choices ([Barszcz et al., 2023](#)). The Choice Theory ([Glasser, 1999](#)) considers power as a basic human need, as well as the other four: survival, love and belonging, freedom, and fun. This theory is essential to contextualise the role of one's self-power in the responsibility for one's life and eventually supporting others to make their own choices.

Power is also present in another critical theory, McClelland's Human Motivation Theory ([McClelland, 1961, 1975, 1985](#)), which helps to identify people's dominant motivating drivers and defends that people's needs are non-conscious and appears even before a person acquires language proficiency, and being developed through life experience, considering achievement, power, and affiliation as their primary constructs. Thus, we can notice in this theory the existence of a goal-oriented motivation (achievement) independent of others' situations, expecting recognition for that successful behaviour; the will to be influent (power) and to have a self-regulated control and authority; and, simultaneous, to maintain good relationships with others (affiliation). We conclude that these competitive desires of power and affiliation may substantiate individuals with different balances of those characteristics. Moreover, some studies defended that, like perceptual concepts, goals are mentally represented and stored in memory, like any other social construct, and are activated and used (e.g., [Bargh, 1990, 1997](#)).

[Forbes \(2011, p.87\)](#) presented a taxonomy of nine domains for motivation, comprising two major variables: the focus of aspiration with three areas: "intrapyschic (change in one's sense of self), instrumental (change in one's relationship with the material world), and interpersonal (change in one's social relationships)"; and the levels of aspiration: "change in potential/expectation (I want to be or become a certain way), change in process/experience (I want to do things, experience life, in a certain way), and change in outcomes/ evaluation (I want to have certain types of results, attain certain outcomes)". We can notice in this unified model that the three areas of focus of aspirations may also encompass self-related and social-related determinants of behaviour.

The literature review of [Lammers et al. \(2016\)](#) about power definitions in social psychology found that they often need more conceptual clarity. [Gaski \(2020\)](#) went further, saying that there is a tendency in the literature to abandon the traditional definition of power as an essential social construct related to the capacity to shape the behaviour of another individual or group from a social psychology perspective. [Lammers et al. \(2016\)](#) showed that power covers two aspects of control: control or influence over others and independence or autonomy concerning others. They also found that people do not seek high positions to gain influence over others but to satisfy their need for autonomy and to gain control of their own lives. As [Bennett \(1988\)](#) stated, people motivated by power aspire to have a position that allows them to exercise their power for their self-interest. These findings suggest that social power related to external sources of influence on behaviour can be associated with internal ones, proposed as ego-power orientation, as two intertwined life goals. As such, we define ego-power orientation as the internal motivation that someone can present when striving to achieve goals that satisfy their ego, which allows them to feel in some way self-fulfilment. Moreover, agreeing that the ecological, family and social environment is decisive in forming our personality, we defend the analysis of the balance between one's ego and social power perception supporting their behaviours. This perspective of power motivation is also implicit in some approaches that define it concerning personal and social power, aiming to influence others but achieving different consequences (e.g., [Królewski, 2017](#); [McClelland, 1975](#)). Thus, our approach differs from [McClelland's \(1975, 1987\)](#) and [Winter \(1973\)](#) approach. These authors presented the power motivation as related to personalised (pPower) and socialised power (sPower), both considering the desire to influence others. The pPower is manifested by control and dominance for self-serving, and sPower is about helping and supporting others ([Forbes, 2011](#); [Królewski, 2017](#); [McClelland, 1975](#)). Consequently, we consider the former more related to 'power over others' and the latter to 'power with others'. [Winter \(1973\)](#) identified two dimensions for the power motive: dominance, which reflects the desire to control and influence others and achieve superiority in social hierarchies, and status, as the desire for prestige, recognition, and admiration from others. That is why individuals with a high power motive are more likely to seek out opportunities for leadership and influence, to engage in competitive situations, and to assert themselves in social interactions. In summary, the McClelland and Winter theories emphasize the importance of the power motive in human behaviour, highlighting individuals' pursuit of achievement, affiliation, and power-related goals, but seeing these dimensions within a social environment.

In this context, self-concept could have a crucial role in characterising the individual self, which, together with the relational self and the collective self, are the relevant aspects of identity ([Gaertner et al., 2012](#)). These authors showed evidence of a motivational hierarchy – individual self, relational self, and collective self – among different cultures (China, USA, UK). However, identity and its selves are broader than the concept of ego. Our approach will be closer to the individual self, reflecting the unique nature of a person with their characteristics, traits, interests, roles, goals, and experiences ([Gaertner et al., 2012](#)). Consequently, we prefer to use another concept with a more individualistic approach, which [Nicholls \(1984\)](#) presented as ego involvement. There are many perspectives about what could be considered ego involvement ([Zahid et al. \(2023\)](#)). In the literature, ego involvement is related to self-conscious emotions, such as pride or guilt ([Carpenter, 2019](#)) and personal relevance ([Sherif & Hovland, 1961](#)), which influence values, attitudes, self-concept, and self-identity. For example, in competitive situations, ego-involved people feel more intrinsically motivated, and their end is to demonstrate superior capacity ([Nicholls, 1984](#)). However, people's ability demonstration depends also on the ability of others. [Franken \(2007: p.21\)](#) denominated ego involvement as ego-orientation.

Based on the theoretical clues and evidence pointed out by the authors already named, it is interesting to explore better the power orientations each person may have, consciously or unconsciously, in their

lives. This approach could be the basis for an extension of existing theories of motivation, highlighting the role of the relationship between power orientations that are more ego-oriented and those that have a more relational orientation. Thus, for this study, we want to explore the role of power within the ego and social orientation in tailoring different psychological motivation profiles.

2. Methods

An extensive literature review was conducted to study the concept of power related to the individual perception of one's ego and social power without any limitation for the range of time. The preparation readings about ego and power led us to define the most appropriate keywords to extend the literature review, which is depicted in Fig. 1. We chose the Web of Science and Scopus as the preferable databases for finding quality articles. However, we expanded the search for articles to other databases to have more valuable contributions to the theoretical analysis and development. As such, we used the following combinations into Boolean sentences: a) power* AND ego (121 articles); b) "social power" AND ego (10 articles); and c) "social power" AND ("power over" OR "power to" OR "power with" OR "power within") (242 articles).

The authors used RAYYAN software to help in the screening phase because it helps with duplicate identification and grouped the excluded articles by topic. The **inclusion criteria** were to seek all the articles that present those keywords, and theoretical contributions to explain the role of power related to human motivation from the individual point of view.

The **exclusion criteria** were designed with a clear purpose in mind to focus solely on individual perspectives of ego-power orientation as a means to self-actualization. Therefore, any themes and contexts unrelated to this perspective were excluded, as were studies with specific objectives that the authors found do not contribute to the present

theoretical analysis. These studies often present power relationships within social and professional environments that do not consider an individual perspective concerning ego-power, or present objectives related to the pathologies, technologies, or bio-socio-demographic characteristics that are not in the core of our study purpose related to individual motivation.

Thus, 63 articles were selected for thematic analysis based on two related themes: ego-power orientation and social-power orientation at the individual level. The data obtained by a deductive approach were then used in an inductive way to propose a theoretical power analysis model for individual human motivation.

3. Analysis

Many authors define power as primarily focused on the manifestation of influence and control over others (e.g., DeWall et al., 2011; Keltner et al., 2003; Liu et al., 2022), whereas other definitions highlight the personal ability to act for oneself (e.g., Mast & Hall, 2003; Operario & Fiske, 2001; Overbeck & Park, 2001). These two approaches to the concept of power are interrelated, as we can see in the metaphor used by Galinsky et al. (2014) that matches power with acceleration toward one's goals and perspective-taking as a steering wheel in the scope of one's social power. These authors stated that the goals are often egocentrically focused, and, on the other hand, perspective-taking, i.e., being empathetic, could be the psychological guidance to help people live in their social environment. Their experiments have shown that power is associated with increased difficulty in taking other individuals' perspectives (Galinsky et al., 2006). However, combining power with perspective-taking increases other-oriented information sharing, recognition of others' interests, and more accurate dyadic decisions (Galinsky et al., 2014).

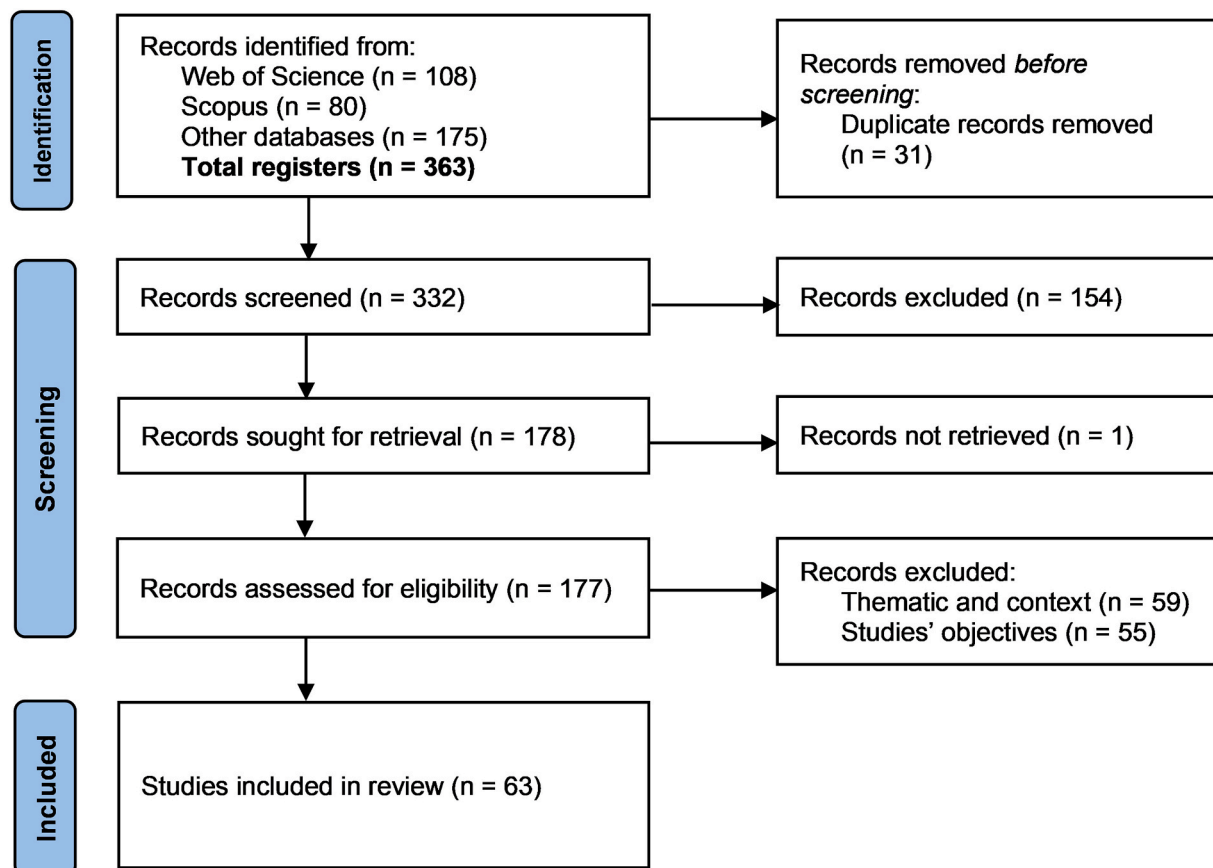


Fig. 1. Flow diagram of articles search.

Nevertheless, power is only considered in a social context, being more oriented to the ego or the others. Studies showed that individuals with a dispositional concern for others may be more empathic and pay more attention to others' needs (e.g., [Chen et al., 2001](#); [Côté et al., 2011](#)). On the other hand, people with high levels of power tend to perceive others as satisfying their own goals and desires ([Keltner et al., 2003](#)). Thus, we considered two themes for the analysis of the elective articles to find out their characterisation in the literature: ego-power orientation and social power orientation.

3.1. Ego-power motivation

The need for power was defined as “a motivational disposition to take pleasure out of having an impact on others or the environment in general and to feel an aversion to others' influence on oneself ([Króléwiak, 2017](#): p.1). Some behaviour details can reinforce people's egos. For example, [Duffy and Feist \(2017\)](#) made a study that shows that people in the high-power pose condition are more likely to imagine themselves moving through time, adopting the ‘moving ego’ perspective, which is related to approach motivations and associated with achieving goals ([Cuddy et al., 2015](#)) than participants in the low-power pose condition, which is related to avoidance motivations (moving time perspective) and facilitating passive or inhibited behaviours ([Higgins, 1997](#)). Thus, high-power and low-power poses may produce and reflect feelings of power and higher tolerance to risk ([Cuddy et al., 2015](#)).

In the context of the superior-subordinate relationship, [Kocer and Mandal \(2018\)](#) showed that the superiors presented higher scores on the need for power, influence, and directiveness. Somehow, a leader may exercise self-serving leadership, which leads to more common deviant behaviours among employees ([Liu et al., 2022](#)). Many studies showed that power increases the tendency to use resources for self-serving advantage (e.g., [Bendahan et al., 2015](#); [Handgraaf et al., 2008](#); [van Dijk et al., 2004](#)). The focus on self-interest exerts a strong and unconscious influence on judgment and behaviour (e.g., [Gino et al., 2011](#); [Moore & Loewenstein, 2004](#); [Shalvi et al., 2012](#)). Neuropsychological research further proves people's automatic tendency is to serve their self-interest. Power activates a cognitive network associated with self-interest and goal focus (e.g., [Galinsky et al., 2003](#); [Guinote, 2017](#); [Smith & Galinsky, 2010](#); [Tost, 2015](#)). Thus, in an organizational context, leaders can help their followers or teams to achieve goals by serving, at the same time, their self-interest ([Maner & Mead, 2010](#)).

Some people associate power with self-interest, and others with social responsibility goals (e.g., [Chen et al., 2001](#); [McClelland, 1975](#)). [Scholl et al. \(2017\)](#) showed that if one receives a high power with a previously adopted cognitive focus (e.g., on another person instead of oneself or taking over another person's perspective), one's perceived social responsibility changes. This effect would not work for low-power individuals because they have little control over resources, being more likely to experience low responsibility, regardless of the cognitive focus they have adopted previously. Moreover, some studies showed that a weak moral identity positively moderated the association between power and high self-interest (e.g., [DeCelles et al., 2012](#)). These authors also explained that the psychological experience of power enhances moral awareness only among those with a strong moral identity. However, other studies (e.g., [Effron & Monin, 2010](#); [Susewind & Walkowitz, 2020](#)) showed that exists a moral balancing based on achieving a positive moral self-perception when a first prosocial act is done, decreasing people's motivation to engage in the subsequent prosocial behaviour. Moreover, to reach a positive moral self-perception, it is needed others' recognition. In this context, ego orientation or involvement has been negatively associated with high levels of moral functioning and prosocial behaviour ([Ring & Kavussanu, 2018](#)).

[Erikson's \(1956\)](#) approach to ego identity considered the awareness of one's self, individual uniqueness, continuity of personal character, and maintenance of binding with the ideals of a group. Ego identity formation is a continuously dynamic process based on sociocultural

context ([Oles, 2016](#)) and intrapersonal characteristics ([Klimstra et al., 2013](#)). Moreover, the study by [Koo \(2018\)](#) showed that high personal intrinsic motivation for achievement influences ego identity development. Another approach defended that ego identity ([Tzuriel, 1984, 1992](#)) could be measured by a multidimensional and continuous scale, comprising seven dimensions: (1) commitment and purposefulness (individual vocational and ideological commitment); (2) solidity and continuity (sense of stability and inner equilibrium); (3) social recognition (individual perception of society appreciation); (4) meaningfulness versus alienation (people's perceptions of lives' involvement, interest, and belonging); (5) physical identity (acceptance of their external appearance and behaviour); (6) genuineness and truthfulness (people see themselves as behaving naturally or pretending); and (7) self-control (they can regulate themselves).

[Lai \(2023\)](#) studied the impact of personal and social power on two dimensions of social perception: warmth and competence. Her research showed that personal power increased stereotype-consistent perceptions of warmth. In contrast, social power increased the perceptions of competence and agency, identified as a separate dimension. Personal power is defined around dimensions of personal agency (taking effective action), power over oneself (autonomy), and independence from others ([Lai, 2023](#); [Lammers et al., 2009](#)), and also can be linked to the will for dominance and self-serving ([Króléwiak, 2017](#)). Other authors call it internal power (e.g., [Wagers, 2015](#)) as a development of critical components of the self, such as one's self-concept, self-esteem, self-efficacy, autonomy, and sense of mastery. Although personal power can differ across social contexts ([Anderson et al., 2008](#)), individuals are consistent with the power they attain across them (e.g., [Kenny & Zaccaro, 1983](#); [Zaccaro et al., 1991](#)).

Other research streams studied persons, mainly in the Eastern world, that defend a Buddhist approach to life, which is a “tendency to be psychologically free from overidentification with physical appearance, thoughts, and emotions, and to have a lower need to satisfy, protect, and enhance their self” ([Ridthikerd & Huansuriya, 2022](#): p.375). They use the ‘non-clinging to ego’ psychological construct because these persons do not care too much about self-gain or self-serving, being less selfish and less ego-power-driven ([Ridthikerd & Huansuriya, 2022](#)), which seems to be positively related to subjective well-being ([Sahdra et al., 2010](#)).

The capacity of a person to assimilate to and accommodate the environment represents ego strength ([Hartmann, 1939](#)). In this context, [Berzoff \(2011\)](#) defended that we need others to mirror who we are, to appreciate and recognize our behaviour, to support our ambitions, safety, stability, and self-esteem, and to feel connected to the human race ([Kohut, 1996](#)). The resume of thematic analysis of ego-power orientation is presented in [Table 1](#).

Studies by [DeWall et al. \(2011\)](#) show that power motivates self-regulation toward effective performance unless leaders consider the task unworthy, even when resources for self-regulation are low (ego depletion). However, other studies (e.g., [Gieseler et al., 2020](#); [Inzlicht & Schmeichel, 2012](#); [Troll et al., 2022](#)) defended that ego depletion could be caused by a motivational deficit instead of a resource deficit. Thus, a position of power or leadership motivates a person to self-regulate effort, leading to performance improvement. Self-regulation or self-control is about altering one's behaviours to align them with the standards socially desirable ([Baumeister, 1998](#)). Self-control involves managing impulses, emotions, thoughts, and desires to achieve personal goals, feeling powerful when influencing others, and feeling powerless when influenced by others ([Kim et al., 2015](#); [Muraven & Baumeister, 2000](#)). Self-regulation is critical for people to make healthier choices in their goals ([Fennis, 2022](#)), is connected to ego depletion and motivation, and can yield long-term benefits to society ([Baumeister & Vohs, 2007](#)). As such, we consider self-regulation or self-control connected to ego and social power.

In an organizational context, leadership and team control would be more frequent when a person feels a generalized sense of power

Table 1
Thematic analysis related to ego-power orientation.

| Theme | Categories | Subcategories | References |
|-----------------------|--|--|--|
| Ego-power orientation | Need for power | High-power pose condition | Królewiak (2017); Kocur and Mandal (2018); Duffy and Feist (2017). |
| | Self-serving | Self-image Self-esteem | Liu et al. (2022); Bendahan et al. (2015); Handgraaf et al. (2008); van Dijk et al. (2004) Królewiak (2017); Le et al. (2013). |
| | Self-interest | Weak moral identity (moderation: DeCelles et al., 2012). Moral balancing (Effron & Monin, 2010; Susewind & Walkowitz, 2020) | Gino et al. (2011); Moore and Loewenstein (2004); Shalvi et al. (2012); Galinsky et al. (2003); Guinote (2017); Smith and Galinsky (2010); Tost (2015); Nadler (2002); Sassenberg et al. (2012). |
| | Ego identity | (1) commitment and purposefulness; (2) solidity and continuity; (3) social recognition; (4) meaningfulness versus alienation; (5) physical identity; (6) genuineness and truthfulness; and (7) self-control. | Erikson (1956); Oles (2016); Klimstra et al. (2013); Koo (2018); Tzuril (1984, 1992). |
| | Ego orientation or involvement | | Ring and Kavussanu (2018) |
| | Personal power or internal power | Personal agency. Power over oneself (autonomy). Independence from others. Self-concept, self-esteem, self-efficacy, autonomy, and sense of mastery. | Lai (2023); Lammers et al. (2009); Królewiak (2017); Wagers (2015); Anderson et al. (2008). |
| Ego strength | Ambitions, safety, stability, and self-esteem. | Hartmann (1939); Berzoff (2011); Kohut (1996). | |
| Non-clinging to ego | | Ridthikerd and Huansuriya (2022) Sahdra et al. (2010) | |

(Anderson & Galinsky, 2006). A personal sense of power leads to more assertive and positive experiences and increases self-esteem, physical health, and longevity (e.g., Adler et al., 2000; Keltner et al., 2003). As a psychological state, the sense of power influences how people feel, think, and behave, being an internal mental representation of their power concerning others (Tost, 2015). Another example is related to interpersonal behaviours that can activate the sense of power, like a context of advice-giving, which enhances that feeling and motivates people to do it (Schaefer et al., 2018). Moreover, a personal sense of power could positively relate to pro-social behaviours and an internal locus of control (Anderson et al., 2012).

A recent theory (approach-inhibition-avoidance theory of power) defends that individuals, like intermediary managers, often fluctuate between a high and low sense of power across situations (Anicich et al., 2021; Anicich & Hirsh, 2017; Smith & Hofmann, 2016), which leads to psychological distress and somatic symptoms. Another study about abusive supervision showed that there is not a significant relationship between power and abusive supervision unless it is mediated by higher psychological distance (social distance theory of power), which strengthens abusive supervision (Huang & Tian, 2021). These authors also concluded that high power leads to higher self-control, which weakens abusive supervision. These two theories of power make different predictions regarding the effects of power on self-control (Heller et al., 2017). On the one hand, according to the approach/inhibition theory of power (Keltner et al., 2003), people with high power activate the behavioural approach system, enjoying rewards and opportunities and showing relatively poor self-control.

On the other hand, according to the social distance theory of power (Magee & Smith, 2013), people with high power feel more subjectively distant from others, leading to more abstract mental representation (higher-level construal) and benefiting their self-control (e.g., Fujita et al., 2006; Schmeichel et al., 2011). To solve this contradiction, Heller et al. (2017) preferred to use the distinction between initiatory (start) and inhibitory (stop) self-control to analyse their relations with self-control. High-power persons performed better in starting self-control tasks and worse in stopping self-control tasks. Moreover, people with higher self-control tend to report a greater sense of power over others (Kim et al., 2015). A person who perceives a high sense of power is more effective at influencing others (Bandura, 1991). A highly subjective sense of power can be achieved through authenticity, which positively impacts others' appreciation of one's power (Gan et al., 2018). It seems that the relative self-sufficiency of the powerful frees them to pursue their own beliefs, goals, emotions, and values.

Two main approaches to power, predicted by the evolutionary theory of status and leadership, are dominance (personal power used with force and selfish manipulation) and prestige (social power conferring influence due to gathering others' respect) (Henrich & Gil-White, 2001; McClelland, 1975). However, dominance can also be a behavioural system that comprises motivation to achieve social power and self-perception of power (Johnson & Carver, 2012). Social dominance orientation describes an individual's preference for hierarchy in a social system, presenting a negative relationship with self-reported generosity (Brown, 2011; Sidanius & Pratto, 2001). Thus, domination could be a kind of social power that enables an actor to obtain power or benefits from other actors, shaping their consciousness by constitutive rules and group collective intentionality, which manifests a process of reification (Thompson, 2017). For this author, domination is distinct from social power since the latter can be used for the purposes and interests of the community and not only for the benefit of the one who wields power.

The resume of thematic analysis about ego and social power together is presented in Table 2.

In summary, we conclude that ego-power orientation can be positively related to and represented by the need for power, high-power pose condition, self-serving, self-interest, ego identity, ego orientation or involvement, personal power or internal power, and ego strength, and negative by non-clinging to ego. Ego-power orientation shares with social power orientation the concepts of self-regulation or self-control or personal control, a sense of power, dominance, and prestige (Tables 1 and 2).

3.2. Social power motivation

As Zaaiman (2007) described, the first generation of social power definitions is essentially related to the concept of 'power over' (e.g., Dahl, 1957; Weber, 1947, 1962). The second generation of definitions moved to the view that power is the capacity to bring about effects related to the concept of 'power to' (e.g., Giddens, 1991; Hunt & Nevin, 1974). The third generation of definitions presents a more comprehensive description of power, especially concerning related concepts like change and influence. Many other concepts appeared in the literature, leading Zaaiman to propose a third generation for power definition as "the ability, in view of the possibility of change, to influence the actions and opinions of people, and so causes effects in affairs and people" (p. 374).

Keltner et al. (2003) stated that social power is about having asymmetrical control over valued resources, creating the capacity to

Table 2
Thematic analysis related to categories that belong to ego and social power.

| Theme | Categories | Subcategories | References |
|----------------------|---|------------------|---|
| Ego and social power | Self-regulation or self-control or personal control | | DeWall et al. (2011); Baumeister (1998); Kim et al. (2015); Muraven and Baumeister (2000); Fennis (2022); Baumeister and Vohs (2007); Huang and Tian (2021); Heller et al. (2017); Keltner et al. (2003); Fujita et al. (2006); Schmeichel et al. (2011); Ryan and Deci (2000); Cislak et al. (2018). |
| | Sense of power | Self-sufficiency | Anderson and Galinsky (2006); Adler et al. (2000); Anicich & Hirsh (2017, 2021); Smith and Hofmann (2016); Kim et al. (2015); Bandura (1991); Gan et al. (2018); Gan et al. (2018). |
| | Dominance | | Henrich and Gil-White (2001); McClelland (1975); Johnson and Carver (2012); Brown (2011); Thompson (2017); Królewski (2017); Fiske and Neuberg (1990); Anderson et al. (2012); Galinsky et al. (2003); Haugaard (2012). |
| | Prestige | | Henrich and Gil-White (2001); McClelland (1975). |

influence others. This conceptual approach to social power implies control over behaviour, as the first generation of power definitions defended, and also over resources (second and third generations). Thus, social power allows the leader access to the group's tangible and intangible assets, like physical resources, friends, respect, praise, or admiration (Keltner et al., 2003). However, power is more than the control over resources, dominance, or one's social position; it is also a psychological state related to the perception of one's capacity to influence others (Anderson et al., 2012; Galinsky et al., 2003). Moreover, Guinote (2017) says that there are three conceptions of power: asymmetric interdependence (the actual or potential ability to influence another), control over outcomes (the power holder has a resource that another person values), and socio-functional relations in groups (origins and functions of power; legitimized power structures that contribute to collective goals and are recognized by others). This author defends Fiske and colleagues' functionalist theory of power, namely their studies about the links between social attention and motivation (e.g., Fiske & Neuberg, 1990). Power decreases social attention because powerful people may be overloaded with other priorities, not depend on others, or have a dominant personality and do not want to pay attention (Fiske, 1993).

In social power, 'power to' is related to the means that one has to enforce one's will, and 'power over' is related to the number of followers one can get (Giurge et al., 2021). However, research has demonstrated that having personal control helps maintain an intrinsic motivation for action, enhances performance, and improves overall well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Thus, it is possible to admit that power over others could be the factor behind the antisocial effects of power instead of personal control (Cislak et al., 2018).

There is some debate about distinguishing between 'power to' and 'power over' (e.g., Battagazzorre (2017); Pansardi, 2012a, 2012b; Morriss, 2012). Other literature presented 'power over' as domination and considered 'power to or with' as empowerment (e.g., Haugaard, 2012). However, we defend the approach of Avelino et al. (2023) that links all the concepts. These authors had a perspective of power concerning the social context, defining 'power to' as "the capacity to intentionally mobilise resources and/or to achieve specific goals" (p.5). On the other hand, for these authors, 'power over' implies "processes of

coercion, domination, dependency, oppression, and exploitation" (p.5), and it can be consciously or unconsciously manifested in authoritative or more subtle ways. They consider 'power with' as "the collective capacity to collaborate to achieve collective goals" (p.5), including co-action and empowerment. Thus, we consider that the power to get things done may be manifested by forcing and domination (power over) in one extreme and the other acting in concert, trying to help others through collaborative and empowerment approaches (power with).

In organizational studies, power over others is also seen as a dominant force inhibiting empowerment and emancipation (e.g., Clegg et al., 2006). However, van Baarle et al. (2022) presented an alternative approach based on the idea that power over could be a necessary and constructive organizational force (e.g., Carlsen et al., 2020), empowering and increasing others' autonomy. We defend that this perspective could be better represented by the concept of 'power with', which van Baarle et al. (2022) defined as enabling power. Again, the lack in the literature of commonly accepted definitions among scientific domains for most of the concepts leads invariably to the possibility of enlarging or narrowing their scope, enacting many debates and confusion. Our aim goes beyond organizational context, as such we propose that the construct of 'social power' includes a continuum between restrictive power or power over and enabling power or power with. In both situations, the actor has the power to act through different combinations of social power, such as the potential to influence others (Chénard-Poirier et al., 2021). For instance, in the organizational context, the supervisor's social power is directly related to perceived leadership effectiveness (Chiu et al., 2017), primarily when power is not used coercively (e.g., Peyton et al., 2019; Pierro et al., 2013).

People express their thoughts, feelings, and attitudes more when they perceive high social power (Anderson & Berdahl, 2002; Chen et al., 2009; Keltner et al., 2003). Social power can be enacted by expert power, legitimate power, referent power, reward power, and coercive power, and every person would have a combination of these five power bases to influence others (Flurry & Burns, 2005). A previous theory (e.g., French & Raven, 1959; Raven, 2008: the interpersonal power interaction model) proposed a taxonomy of 11 social power bases: expert, informational, referent power, legitimacy of dependence, reciprocity, legitimacy of position, legitimacy of equity, personal and interpersonal coercion, and personal and impersonal reward. These power bases are considered the resources for social power, which led Gaski (2020) to criticize the inclusion of control over resources in the social power definition, defending that these resources are means and not the ends of social power.

Gaski (2020: pp.18-19) presented the definitions of several constructs that he defends as the core of the traditional and assertive concept of social power as the capacity to shape the behaviour of another individual or group. They are as follows: Power base (power resources), power source (power target's perception of a power base, i.e., cognition of the ability), power means (how a person communicates power, or power target becomes aware of that power), the exercise of power base (activating or using a power base), the exercise of power source (target's perception of power base exercise), power (abbreviation for social power—the ability to get another to do what would not have been done otherwise), exercised power (getting another to do what would not have been done otherwise, or the enactment of behavioural change in another), control or influence (commonly used as synonyms for power or exercised power), and influence strategy (power strategy, usually a communication variable by which power is exercised).

The resume of thematic analysis of the theme of social power orientation is presented in Table 3.

4. Discussion

The thematic analysis of the two approaches to power (ego and social) as one of the leading human motivations (e.g., Glasser, 1999; McClelland, 1961, 1975, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2017) led us to find several

Table 3
Thematic analysis related to social power orientation.

| Theme | Categories | Subcategories | References |
|--------------------------|--|--|---|
| Social power orientation | Social responsibility | | Chen et al. (2001); McClelland (1975); Scholl et al. (2017) |
| | Power over | Dominance Coercion, domination, dependency, oppression, and exploitation. Empowerment and autonomy. | Dahl (1957); Weber (1947, 1962); Giurge et al. (2021); Cislak et al. (2018); Battezzozze (2017); Pansardi (2012a, 2012b); Morriss (2012); Haugaard (2012); Avelino et al. (2023); Clegg et al. (2006); van Baarle et al. (2022); Carlsen et al. (2020); Sassenberg et al. (2012). |
| | Power to | Empowerment Capacity to mobilise resources and/or to achieve specific goals. | Giddens (1991); Hunt and Nevin (1974); Giurge et al. (2021); Pansardi (2012a, 2012b); Morriss (2012); Haugaard (2012); Avelino et al. (2023). |
| | Power with | Empowerment. | Haugaard (2012); Avelino et al. (2023); van Baarle et al. (2022); Nadler (2002). |
| | Enabling power | Collective capacity to collaborate to achieve collective goals. Co-action. | |
| | Influence | Influence strategy (power strategy, normally a communication variable by which power is exercised). Change. | Zaaiman (2007); Keltner et al. (2003); Guinote (2017); Anderson et al. (2012); Galinsky et al. (2003); Bandura (1991); Chénard-Poirier et al. (2021); Gaski (2020); Chiu et al. (2017). |
| | Exercised power (actually getting another to do what would not have been done otherwise, or the enactment of behavioural change in another). | Socio-functional relations in groups / Social position. Leadership effectiveness. | |
| | Control over resources | Exercise of power base (activating or using a power base). Expert power, legitimate power, referent power, reward power, and coercive power. | Keltner et al. (2003); Guinote (2017); Anderson et al. (2012); Galinsky et al. (2003); Gaski (2020); Flurry and Burns (2005); French and Raven (1959); Raven (2008); Gaski (2020). |
| | Power base | Expert, informational, referent power, legitimacy of dependence, reciprocity, legitimacy of position, legitimacy of equity, personal and interpersonal coercion, and personal and impersonal reward. Power source (power target's perception of a power base). Exercise of power source (target's perception of power base exercise). Power means (how a person communicates power, or the power target becomes aware of that power). | |

variables that characterised each type of power and a few that contribute for both power orientations. As such, we defend that the balance between ego-power orientation and social power orientation could be one bi-univocally related source of human motivation. Variables, such as self-regulation or self-control or personal control, sense of power, self-sufficiency, dominance, and prestige, have a shared impact on both ego-power and social power orientations. For this reason, we consider that they are not the best constructs to analyse separately the two orientations.

Analysing the combinations of ego-power and social power orientations, we can notice that, for example, inter-group helping could be driven by self-interest to maintain social power or an altruistic approach to help others (Nadler, 2002). Social power, as the control over others' outcomes, can be construed as an opportunity focused on self-interest or a responsibility focused on the implications of one's actions and is likely more dependent on others to achieve prosocial goals (Sassenberg et al., 2012). Pro-sociality behaviours do not arise only from altruistic motives because of egoistic motives, such as expecting to receive something in return or avoiding sanctions (Batson & Powell, 2003). Thus, self-serving and egoistic actions, like increasing one's positive self-image or self-esteem (e.g., Le et al., 2013), can also lead to prosocial behaviour, even throughout a cost-benefit analysis (Keltner et al., 2014). Moreover, recently, Wang et al. (2021) showed that although money made people ignore others when others were not crucial for their future gain, generosity would not be necessarily affected when egoistic motives were present.

The literature also predicts that a person with a high ego-power orientation or involvement has been negatively associated with high levels of moral functioning and prosocial behaviour (Ring & Kavussanu, 2018). High self-control helps people achieve personal goals and feel powerful when influencing others (Kim et al., 2015; Muraven & Baumeister, 2000). Social dominance orientation describes an individual's

preference for hierarchy in a social system, being less generous (Brown, 2011), using power over others to obtain benefits, shaping their consciousness by rules, and manifesting a reification process (Thompson, 2017). In this context, we defend that a person presents an 'imperator' profile, with high orientation to ego and social power over others, being concerned with the self (e.g., Zeigler-Hill et al., 2023), feeling a need for recognition and validation (e.g., Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001), dominant (e.g., Clegg et al., 2006), competitive (e.g., Hirschi & Jaensch, 2015), authoritative (e.g., Avelino et al., 2023), status-conscious (e.g., Henrich & Gil-White, 2001), goal-driven (e.g., Guinote, 2017), risk-taking (e.g., Cuddy et al., 2015), and ambitious and self-confident (Fegan & Bland, 2021).

However, social power can also be used for the purposes and interests of the community (Thompson, 2017). For instance, in an organizational context, leaders can help their followers achieve goals and have prosocial behaviours (Anderson et al., 2012; Chiu et al., 2017) and, at the same time, serve their self-interest (Maner & Mead, 2010). In this context, we consider that a person presents a 'leader' profile, taking care of their ego but using their power with others, helping them to achieve objectives. They can present some characteristics of the imperator, like ambition, self-confidence, competitiveness, and goal-driving, as well as an orientation to 'power with', which confers their leadership qualities, altruism, and empathy (e.g., Chiu et al., 2017; Côté et al., 2011; Nadler, 2002).

There is also a different approach to defending the utility of power over others (e.g., van Baarle et al., 2022), based on the idea that this type of power helps to construct an organizational force (Carlsen et al., 2020), empowering and increasing others' autonomy, being the perspective represented by the concept of 'power with', which van Baarle et al. (2022) defined as enabling power. Thus, when this situation happens with someone with a high ego orientation, one has a leader profile. However, when the individual has a low ego orientation, one

calls it a ‘supporter’ profile. They are humble, selfless, empathetic, compassionate, altruistic, generous, team player, supportive, patient, tolerant, advocates for social causes, active listeners, modest, behind-the-scenes roles, and grateful (e.g., Côté et al., 2011; Galinsky et al., 2014; Glasser, 1999; McClelland, 1975).

Nevertheless, a situation rarely studied is when someone has and enjoys a high power over others but presents a low ego-power orientation. In this context, we call it a ‘controller’ profile. It is an individual who prefers to control others but does not have or like to have a high-power pose condition, nor use their power to self-serving or self-interest, being in the limit non-clinging to ego (Ridhikerd & Huansuriya, 2022). They can be manipulative, calculating, strategic, persuasive, adaptable, and have leadership aspirations (e.g., Guinote, 2017; Keltner et al., 2003).

This deduction from what has been studied and published led us to develop the ‘Ego-Social Power Motivation Model’ (Table 4).

In summary, this model depicted the two power orientations that define four motivation profiles: (1) Emperor, with high ego-power and power over orientations; Leader, with high ego-power and power with orientations; Controller, with low ego-power and high power over orientations; and Supporter, with low ego-power and high power with orientations.

5. Conclusion

This study explored the power concept, which has been mainly seen in the literature as related to social power. However, we discovered in the literature the implicit assertion related to the power of the ego, which we propose as a crucial motive for human activities. The cross-relation of the two types of orientations, from an individual point of view, was demonstrated in past research. However, the approach to tracing profiles combining the two power motivations could be auspicious in better characterising and explaining different human motivations and their consequences and outcomes in different life phases and situations. A new model for evaluating power in human motivation is proposed, which crosses the orientations toward ego and social power – The Ego-Social Power Motivation Model. In this model, it is possible to combine ego-power and social power orientation to define four human motivation profiles: emperor, leader, controller, and supporter. This typification model could be the base for developing new measurement tools to determine the details of one's personality power in diverse contexts and situations, namely on human motivation. These measures could also help explain human motivation in combination with the other social and personal constructs already used. This future research can allow us to understand people's psychological profiles better, with great benefits, such as recruiting workers and managers for organisations in different contexts.

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CRediT authorship contribution statement

João M.S. Carvalho: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Visualization, Validation, Methodology, Investigation, Funding acquisition, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Ana Conde:** Writing – review & editing, Validation, Supervision, Funding acquisition, Formal analysis.

Declaration of competing interest

None.

Table 4

Ego-social power motivation model.

| | Low ego-power oriented | High ego-power oriented |
|-------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|
| Power over others | Controller | Emperor |
| Power with others | Supporter | Leader |

Data availability

No data was used for the research described in the article.

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