

# Embedding the Power Threat Meaning Framework to Promote Global Anti-Oppressive Educational Psychology practice

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There is a recognition of the need for Educational Psychologists (EPs) to work in more globally responsive ways, given the acknowledgement of the oppressive roots of EP practice towards the global majority. Within the UEL Professional Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology programme, there has been a movement towards increasing critical reflection on this history and the exploration of tools for anti-oppressive practice. The Power Threat Meaning Framework (PTMF) fits with a critical psychology approach by viewing people’s emotional distress in response to their experiences. This paper explores how colleagues at UEL have applied the principles of the PTMF in various ways through research and practice. The authors conclude that using the PTMF in EP practice can provide opportunities to disrupt the flow of oppressive power, and recommendations for practice are provided.

*Keywords:* Power Threat Meaning Framework, global psychology, anti-oppressive practice, educational psychology, participatory, emancipatory

## Introduction

From a global perspective and within the UK context, there is a plethora of evidence that children’s life circumstances can influence the development and maintenance of their behaviour and emotional distress (e.g. *Felliti et al., 1998, 2002, Bethnal, 2017*).

Research exploring these concerns has investigated the impact of children being exposed to ‘Adverse Childhood Events’ (ACEs), such as abuse, neglect and domestic abuse on their life outcomes (*Felliti et al., 1998, Webster, 2022*). Experiencing childhood adversity is associated with the risk of developing physical and mental health concerns and associated with lower educational attainment (*Sheffler et al., 2020, Smith et al, 2021*).

Social inequalities, discrimination and oppression have also been well documented within the UK and from a global perspective (e.g., *United Nations, 2020*). This includes inequalities related to race and ethnicity (*Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2016*), sexuality and gender identity (*Hudson-Sharp & Metcalf, 2016*), and disability (*Office for National Statistics, 2021*). When faced with adversity, individuals will experience emotional distress and across cultures there will be a different set of meanings for making sense of emotional distress and behaviours (*Boyle, 2022*). Within western cultures, such as the UK, medical models of distress are the most privileged and dominate discourse and approaches to understanding emotional distress and behaviour. Discourse related to symptoms, disorders and illness are often used when making sense of someone’s emotional distress and separates understanding the influences of social, political and economic context.

Systemic issues and oppression can play out in the lives

of children and young people within schools. Schools can replicate views related to medical models of distress when making meaning of children’s behaviour (*Begum, 2022*). This is evident in, for example the global majority groups such as Black and Mixed-race children, children from the Roma, gypsy and traveller communities, and children with autistic spectrum condition and SEND being more at risk of school exclusions (*Menzies et al., 2015, Li, 2021*). Research has highlighted that those groups at risk of exclusions are more likely to have experienced social, emotional mental health concerns, poverty and lack of adequate housing (*Cole, 2015*).

Anti-oppressive practice involves the active disruption of systems and social structures that cause marginalised groups to be Othered (*Legate, 2023*). It aims to challenge and disrupt systems of oppression that implicitly maintain an order of harm whilst privileging and normalising certain groups (*Kumashiro, 2000*). In turn, the use of power to oppress people then becomes the norm, as noted in earlier work of *Foucault (1991)*. This is evident in how children with SEND, such as those with SEMH are spoken about in interpersonal exchange. This includes deficit-based language rooted in the Westernised dominant medical model. This type of model reinforces negative stereotypes and stigma often without the acknowledgment of how power, inequality, poverty, racism and community violence contribute to the distress in children and young people (*O’Toole, 2022*).

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (*United Nations, 2015*) outlined seventeen goals to be actioned by all developing and developed countries as a global partnership. In particular, and most relevant to this paper, the fourth sustainable goal focuses on ‘inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning

opportunities for all' with the following areas being fundamental to promoting anti-oppressive practice and calling for radical ways of working to promote globally inclusive practices:

- 'Eliminating gender disparities in education and ensuring access to all levels of education and vocational training for vulnerable individuals such as those with disabilities, indigenous people and children in vulnerable situations;
- 'Building and upgrading education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all'.
- 'Ensuring that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including education for sustainable lifestyles, human rights, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development'.

This goal is highly relevant and applicable to EP practice, as will now be discussed. Fluctuations in migration patterns across the generations within UK over time means families and children bring their own intersectional and cultural identities, experiences of adversity and resilience (Burns, 2021). There is also an increase in children experiencing social, emotional and mental health needs with recent figures showing that 61.2% of 11–16-year-olds in the UK present with a probable mental health condition (NHS Digital, 2022). Overall, this means that EPs are increasingly working with diverse communities. EPs can positively influence how schools and society understand children's distress and related behaviour by using psychological frameworks that are culturally responsive and can shape awareness of the impact of wider social inequalities on a child's experiences of emotional distress.

Anti-oppressive practice highlights the need for school systems to be supported in examining their role in sustaining inequality through understanding that oppression can only be understood in relation to the wider social, political and economic contexts (Kumashiro, 2000, Furman, 2012, Brooks & Watson, 2018). It can also involve supporting school staff to overcome deficit and within-child thinking. This can include changing how emotional distress can be understood as a survival strategy (Rivera-McCutchen & Watson, 2014, O'Toole, 2022).

This drive to work in more globally responsive ways is set within the recent context of the EP profession acknowledging the colonial and sometimes oppressive roots of EP practice towards global majority people. As one of the UK's EP training institutions, our UEL Professional Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology programme

has become increasingly critically reflective of EP history, as evidenced in the publication of the position statement on anti-racism and decolonisation (ThomasG et al., 2020). To reflect, learn and move forward, we have become interested in tools for practice, including frameworks that help shape EP approaches to promote anti-oppressive and globally responsive practice. It was through this exploration that the Power Threat Meaning Framework (PTMF) (Johnstone et al., 2018) was considered. This includes critical engagement with the cultural assumptions on which UK EP practice is based,

It [the PTMF] unpicks the beliefs and assumptions that have led to this state of affairs, tracing them back to their roots. In the West, the ideas and assumptions are so taken for granted that they are almost invisible – they just seem to be facts about the way things are. (Boyle & Johnstone, 2020, p149)

Key to starting and supporting this journey was one of the co-authors of the PTMF, Professor David Harper, who kindly provided time for the tutor team to share knowledge and answer our many questions, and who has provided a guest comment at the end of this paper.

This paper provides examples of how colleagues on the programme team (both tutors and Trainee Educational Psychologists, TEPs) have used the PTMF in research and practice. The authors of the paper have recently formed the programme's PTMF Interest Group and are keen to share some learning from their early research and practice to support others in the EP community and our multi-disciplinary partners who might be interested in using the PTMF ideas in practice.

### **The Power Threat Meaning Framework**

The Power Threat Meaning Framework (Boyle et al, 2018), developed in collaboration with people with lived experience, offers an alternative to psychiatric diagnosis, and understanding people's distress in response to their experiences, in particular how power has affected them. Further, the PTMF seeks to address the Western-centric philosophical assumptions on which understanding of psychology, including emotional distress is based, 'In other words, in the fields of distress, Westerners may have more to learn and less to offer than is often assumed' (Boyle & Johnstone, 2020, p162).

The PTMF therefore fits well within critical psychology seeking to be more globally responsive, anti-oppressive and trying to understand people in relation to their context and power around them. In particular, this framework has the potential to be used to shape thinking (such as in consultation and in case formulation) which is culturally

responsive and flexible in considering a range of power experienced by an individual, such as ideological power, cultural capital, interpersonal power and power by force,

It [the PTMF] highlights and clarifies the links between wider social factors such as poverty, discrimination and inequality, along with traumas such as abuse and violence, and the resulting emotional distress or troubled behaviour, whether it is confusion, fear, despair or troubled or troubling behaviour. (Boyle, cited at <https://www.bps.org.uk/member-networks/division-clinical-psychology/power-threat-meaning-framework>)

The PTMF offers a fundamental shift from within-person attributions of ‘what is wrong with you?’, to wondering about the person’s experience, ‘what has happened to you?’. The PTMF authors state that the PTMF is a set of ideas, underpinned by core assumptions, which can be explored through four key questions:

1. What has happened to you? (How is power operating in your life?)
2. How did it affect you? (What kind of threats does this pose?)

3. What sense did you make of it? (What is the meaning of these situations and experiences to you?)
4. What did you have to do to survive? (What kinds of threat response are you using?)

Two additional questions are also posed, which provide the opportunity for making sense of the experience (giving it a narrative) and activating skills and resources, akin to strengths-based approaches:

5. What are your strengths? (What access to power resources do you have?)
6. What is your story? (How does all this fit together?)

Therefore, use of the PTMF it is not scripted or formulaic, but open for people to use in ways fitting their practice, building on a set of core assumptions about how people experience and make sense of the world. In practice, this has meant at times, the authors of this paper have needed to protect time and space to think about how to apply the ideas in practice, which is reflected upon in this paper.

**Using the PTMF in Educational Psychology**

The PTMF is flexible providing the opportunity for it to be applied to the five core functions of educational psychology: consultation, assessment, intervention, training and research and strategic development. The table (Table 1) outlines possible applications of PTMF in EP practice.

Core EP Function	Possible uses of the PTMF
Consultation	The PTMF can be used as part of a conversational pathway which considers how power has/is impacting on a person’s life, responses to this (threat responses), how they have survived (resource activation) and making sense of their story. It potentially helps to develop a new shared understanding of the person’s emotional distress and response in a non-pathologising and person-centred way.
Assessment	Importantly, the PTMF can be used in case formulation as part of the assessment process. This influences the questions and approaches used in assessment, as well as current thinking and recommendations, which consider power, oppression, culturally responsive practice and autonomy.
Intervention	The PTMF could be used to guide individual or group intervention. For example, it could be used with young people to explore the role power and threat has played in their life and combined with narrative therapy and positive psychology tools to explore ways of writing more empowering narratives and taking proactive steps to resist any negative impacts of power. See Rachael John’s discussion of her thesis below for more ideas of how the framework can be used in interventions.
Training	The PTMF can be used as a way to introduce the topic of power to school staff, providing a radically different approach to understanding and supporting children. The framework can also promote systemic reflections, including use in individual and peer supervision, about how power is operationalised within the school, creating insights to inspire a shift towards a more equitable and anti-oppressive system. See Barry Foster and Lucy Browne’s reflections on training others in the use of PTMF.
Research and strategic development	The PTMF is already being used in research, as a lens through which to understand narratives about power (see doctoral thesis research examples below).

Table 1. Using the PTMF in educational psychology practice

### Using the PTMF in thesis research

As the PTMF becomes further embedded into the UEL Professional Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology, TEPs in both Year 2 and 3 are using the PTMF in various ways in their thesis research. This has included using it as a framework fitting with their ontological position to critically consider how they make sense of the world, as well as using the PTMF in action research with both adult and children research participants, as detailed below by Barry, Siobhan and Rachael.

#### **Thesis research example by Barry Foster: 'An exploration of school staff's views about the 'Power Threat Meaning Framework' and its potential application with children and young people at risk of exclusion'.**

As a Year 2 Trainee Educational Psychologist, I am exploring the potential uses of the PTMF in education, particularly in the context of staff working with young people at risk of exclusion. Studies show that excluded young people are more likely to come from marginalised communities (Demie, 2021) who have historically been on the receiving end of power imbalances in the form of institutional and overt forms of discrimination and injustice.

Research also shows that teachers' biases can mediate their responses to students' behaviour (Liljequist & Renk, 2007). My hypothesis is that the PTMF may help teachers to develop more compassionate and contextually aware interpretations of students' behaviours, moving away from deficit-based narratives and within-child explanations. This understanding could help to shift schools away from exclusionary behaviour management policies and practices.

My thesis involves a 3-session intervention where I introduce staff to the PTMF and assist them in applying the framework to formulate new perspectives on the motivations behind students' behaviours. Following this, a focus group with staff, including a co-researcher, will evaluate the framework's strengths, challenges, as well as seeking staff's suggestions for any potential adaptations that might make the framework more accessible for wider use in schools.

#### **Thesis research example by Siobhan O'Leary: 'Promoting the voices of Children and Young people who have experienced Domestic Abuse'**

I am a Year 3 Trainee Educational Psychologist, and my Doctoral thesis is set within a national context of increasing reports of Domestic Abuse (DA), and legislation which positions children who have experienced Domestic Abuse

(CEDA), as victims (Domestic Abuse Act, 2021). CEDAs are exposed to multiple forms of threatening power, and I developed a curiosity about how the PTMF could be used to make sense of their behaviour.

I took a participatory research approach to recruiting CEDAs as co-researchers, to explore matters of importance to them. My research was embedded within the PTMF, which aligns with participatory research approaches in its positioning of individuals as experts by experience and promotes the importance of service user narrative (Johnstone and Boyle, 2018). The three co-researchers, aged 10-12 years old, designed the research question: "*How can adults support children who have experienced abuse between parents, to express themselves?*".

The findings suggested that the operation of power was a mediating factor in CEDAs being able to express themselves. CEDAs have their own expectations about support and find paternalistic support unhelpful. CEDAs value autonomy when making decisions about their support and they prefer to express themselves to familiar adults, as this reduces the threat to confidentiality. I interpreted the findings by mapping them onto the PTMF (see Figure 1).

Using the PTMF enabled me to contribute a novel perspective to the research field, which I hope will promote social justice by shifting the narrative around CEDAs as competent, autonomous meaning-makers, rather than just victims. It is recommended that multi-disciplinary professionals engage in anti-oppressive practices such as inviting CEDAs to design, monitor and evaluate support services, to reduce threat responses to paternalistic support.

#### **Thesis research example by Rachael John: 'Exploring secondary school students' experiences of the Power Threat Meaning Framework'**

I am a Year 2 Trainee Educational Psychologist, and my research aims to explore secondary school students' views of the PTMF. Whilst the PTMF was initially developed for adults and co-developed by psychologists and experts by experience (Johnstone & Boyle, 2018), the authors of the framework and members of a self-help group (SHIFT Recovery Community, 2020) and other experts by experience (Griffiths, 2019) using the framework have reflected on the need to make the language and ideas from the framework more accessible to a range of groups including children and young people (Harper & Cromby, 2022).

My research anticipates using focus groups and individual interviews to explore how the PTMF narrative template could be adapted and applied to students experiencing SEMH difficulties. Given the heterogeneity of



Figure 1. Research Findings within the Power-Threat Meaning Framework (O'Leary, 2024)

children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), I will also seek to recruit children with SEMH and students with social communication needs such as Autism and those with differences in cognitive ability. These children can also experience disempowerment due to ableist expectations, which can contribute to their experiences of emotional distress.

My research seeks to incorporate participatory approaches by empowering students as co-researchers to develop the framework into an accessible resource they and other students experiencing SEMH can use. Within the focus groups, the students will be provided with information on the PTMF. They will take part in participatory activities where their views on the PTMF will be sought and will be taught how to group their views into themes. If students' views reflect that the PTMF narrative template needs adapting, the other participatory activity may involve them identifying what is needed to make it accessible and potentially making adaptations to it. In the individual interviews, students will be supported to apply the PTMF to their experiences of SEMH needs of how power operates in their lives.

#### Reflections on training others in using the PTMF

#### Reflections on the experiences of training teachers on the use of the PTMF (Barry Foster)

##### Deeper Exploration of Pupils' Narratives

Staff appreciated the opportunity to explore pupils' narratives in deeper, more complex ways. Throughout the three sessions, they engaged in rich discussions, quickly grasping the framework's key points. They connected pupils' experiences of power with their behaviours or 'threat responses', often resulting in meaningful and critical insights. Discussions moved from focusing on what was wrong with the pupils to considering how to support them, given their challenging experiences.

##### Challenges in Adopting New Perspectives

Some staff found the framework's ideas challenging, reverting to previous 'thin' descriptions of pupils. One teacher questioned, "So you're telling me I should praise Samantha [pseudonym] for bringing a pen to class when she has just been disrespectful to me?" Another felt the framework didn't differ from current practices. High stress levels may make these ideas seem threatening, as if they

Reading Alexis Quinn's (2018) book 'Unbroken: Learning to Live Beyond Diagnosis' regarding her traumatic experiences as an autistic woman caught in the mental health system, where she mentions the PTMF as a springboard for change in the way we approach psychological distress, prompted me to investigate the PTMF further. I am involved as the strategic lead for a service that supports young autistic people who are at risk of admission to mental health hospital and/or other forms of institutionalisation. After reading Johnstone & Boyle's (2020) book on the PTMF, I have been exploring with the team and Dr Lucy Browne (Senior Educational Psychologist) how we can utilise the framework.

As a social worker, the PTMF approach reflects my own frustrations with a medical psychiatry-based model based on diagnosing, pathologising and medicating young people. I love the ethos of '**what has happened to you**', not '**what's wrong with you**', as a way of considering people's presenting issues through a trauma and broader life experience lens which includes the impact of how power or the lack of it is expressed. Dr Lucy Browne, who advantageously is also a tutor at the University of East London, has been supporting our service with a PTMF training programme, case conversations and network meetings. We are using the framework in the support we offer young people, their families, and the whole system. One of those opportunities is us developing a case formulation modality based on PTMF, to create a different, broader, more holistic lens for considering need, which leads to more creative solution focussed support plan from the young person's perspective, acknowledging their needs, and building on their strengths to empower them to understand themselves and adopt new coping mechanisms.

It is early days but the conversation and energy around PTMF within our service is encouraging; it makes sense and our staff, who are enthused and coming up with lots of creative ways about how to embed PTMF across our service offer.

Figure 2. Overview and reflections on using the PTMF in a multi-disciplinary team to promote anti-oppressive practice by Emma Hanson (Senior Commissioning Officer leading of this multi-disciplinary team)

imply a tolerance for misbehaviour. Addressing this misconception was crucial, but it's understandable why stressed teachers might reach such conclusions.

#### Importance of Considering Staff Narratives

School staff themselves are embedded in power relationships and threats, impacting their mental health and wellbeing. Reflecting on power dynamics in their own lives, both professional and personal, could have been a missed opportunity. For example, considering institutional power and the threats teachers face if they don't meet accountability demands, like job loss and economic insecurity, is essential. These underlying factors must be addressed to achieve the framework's emancipatory aims for everyone within the school system.

#### Adapting the Framework for Accessibility and Practicality

To make the framework more accessible, adaptations were necessary. Using visuals, like a porcupine to illustrate 'threat responses', helped communicate key ideas to non-psychologically trained staff. Additionally, staff needed guidance on next steps after understanding the framework. Creating a space for them to consider pupils' strengths, resources, and needs based on their newfound

understanding was beneficial. This approach drew on principles of narrative therapy to provide practical applications of the PTMF.

#### The PTMF as a Long-Term Commitment

The PTMF is not a quick fix; it offers a framework for understanding pupils' experiences and behaviours, aiming for compassionate, healthy relationships. Staff expressed frustration at the slow pace of change, but it's important to remember that this is long-term work. The education system often favours short-term fixes, but the PTMF promotes a philosophy of being and relationships. The complex, deeply entrenched experiences of challenging pupils require patience and commitment over time for the framework to be effective.

#### Using the PTMF to develop shared approach in a multi-disciplinary team (Lucy Browne)

The nature of the PTMF, as a critical psychology approach, has been applied to strategic work by the authors, which seeks to shift the discourse around a young person. An example of this is the introduction and application of the PTMF by a multi-disciplinary team working to support young people with Autism and/or learning disabilities who



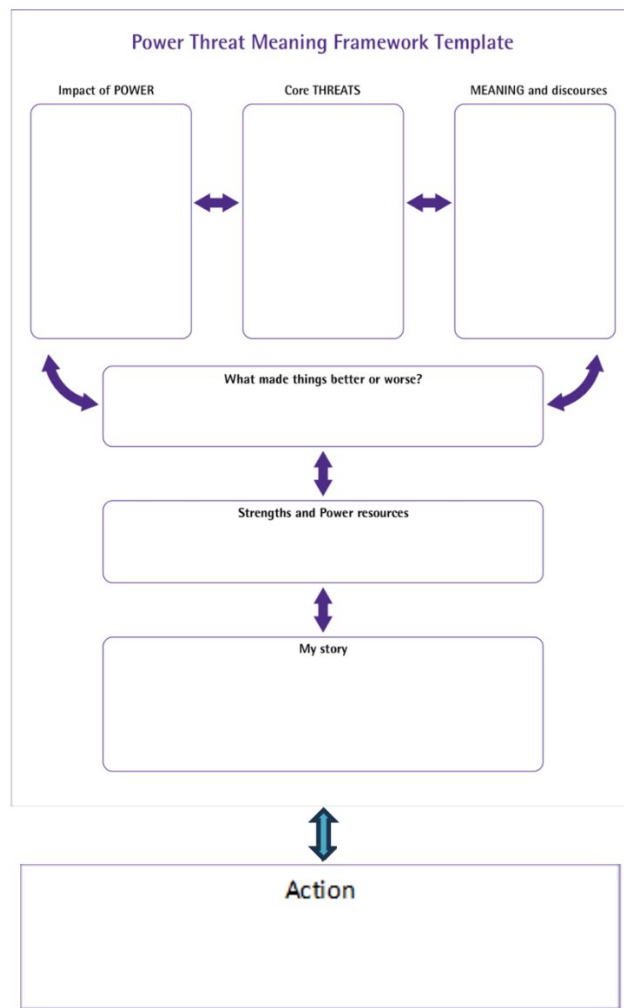


Figure 3. Power Threat Meaning Framework case formulation adapted to include 'Action'

are at risk of admission to mental health hospitals. Part of the teams' work is to support and challenge the system, and in doing so shift a narrative and construct of a young person, leading to a different pathway of action for the young person,

... changing language is not simply about using alternative vocabulary, but opens up new ways of thinking, experiencing and acting. Until this happens, we will simply continue to reproduce existing practices in slightly different, but equally unsatisfactory, forms. (Johnstone, Boyle, Dillon, Harper, Kinderman, Longden, Pilgrim, Read, 2018, p313)

Thus, the PTMF provides an approach to actively disrupt the system (Legate, 2023), offer a new anti-oppressive lens and seek to influence policy and practice.

The Introduction of the PTMF within a multi-disciplinary team has included a pilot of PTMF case formulation focused on specific young people, facilitated by the Educational Psychologist, a training day, follow-up workshop to support and consider how the team are using the PTMF in practice, a shared online resource site, development of a PTMF conversation guide, reflection at team meetings and consideration of further case formulation and changes to paperwork and conversational pathways used by the team.

This work is currently in its initial stages and therefore the impact is still to be considered and is beyond the scope of this article at present. However, there have been many positive indicators of the appropriateness and early impact of the PTMF to this work in ultimately seeking to address anti-oppressive practice of a minoritized group, as highlighted (Figure 2).

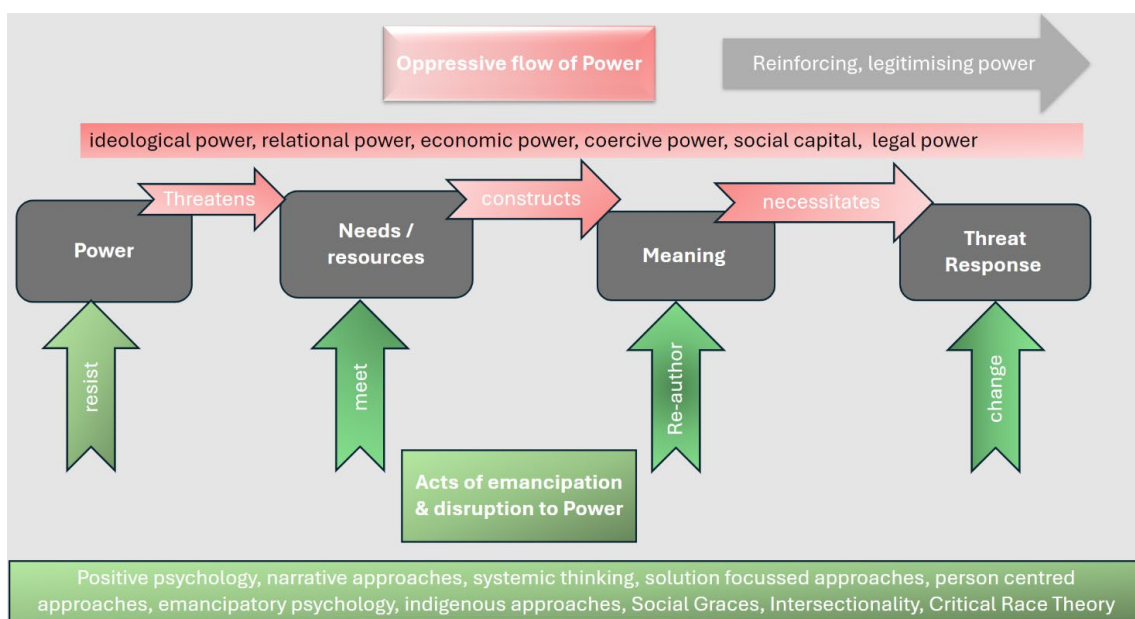


Figure 4. Conceptualisation of acts of emancipation and disruption of power building on the PTMF

### Applying the PTMF in case formulation

As noted earlier, the PTMF provides a set of principles to be applied in practice as practitioners see fit. The examples above demonstrate how the approach has been applied in various ways by the authors, including in research. In addition, the authors also have used the PTMF for case formulation, drawing on the original PTMF case formulation template (Figure 3).

The PTMF has been used with multi-disciplinary teams around young people, where their needs are complex, and their support network appear 'stuck' having exhausted usual tools and approaches. The complexities of need have included issues surrounding self-identity, frequent moves between education, residential and in-patient settings, self-harm, and other expressions of emotional distress; all which are understood as power imposed upon the young person, perceived threats and expression of their emotional distress.

Using the PTMF has enabled networks around the young people to develop a shared and non-pathologising understanding of the young person. It has helped to shift thinking to 'what has happened to you' and 'how have you survived (coped)', and away from 'what is wrong with you'. Interestingly, the multi-disciplinary teams have quickly considered how power has affected the young people and moved away from diagnosis and labels that tend to lead the description of the young people in other situations.

Practically, using the PTMF case formulation template (above) on a flip chart or a shared screen has helped to guide the conversation, develop a sense of shared understanding and importantly have shared language, and ultimately move into considering the meaning (the story).

One area that has been added to the PTMF case formulation document is 'action', as this was noted to naturally develop through collective and shared thinking and starting to think about new and different ways of working to support the young person.

Using a paragraph in 'My Story' to summarise the thinking has been powerful, and this formulation and shared understanding has then been used in EP records for the young person, such as in a consultation record, and as an appendix in psychological advice for statutory assessments. Therefore, it is clear that the PTMF fits well within EP practice supporting a critical psychology approach within case formulation, as well as using the approach to shape thinking in other settings as noted in previous sections.

### Key reflections: Conceptualisation of acts of emancipation and disruption of power building on the PTMF

The UK continues to respond to the growing cultural, ethnic and linguistic diversity across different communities (Sakata, 2021). EPs are responsible for engaging in culturally responsive practice and adopting and challenging anti-oppressive practice when working with children and young people. This supports The United Nations Sustainable Development goal, which highlights the importance of inclusive and equitable education for all. The PTMF demonstrates the role social and personal adversities have in understanding distress. The framework also demonstrates that the experience, expressions and understanding of distress varies widely across cultures. The PTMF can be applied flexibly to empower professionals



working with children and young people within education and children themselves to understand the role of social and personal adversities in understanding response to emotional distress. This paper has provided examples and reflections on how the PTMF can be applied across different systems relevant to EP practice.

Taking our above discussion into account, the above diagram (Figure 4) is our attempt to visually represent the flow of oppressive power (as characterised by the PTMF), as well as opportunities for ‘acts of emancipation’ or ‘disruption to break this flow’.

The aim of this diagram is to encapsulate not only the operation of power as it sits within the PTMF, but also its antidote: opportunities to resist power, to meet previously unmet needs, to re-author meanings previously imposed

upon a person and to change habitual threat responses. At the bottom of the diagram are the various psychological approaches which we feel best meet the emancipatory goals of the model.

We hope that, moving forwards, the diagram can help colleagues to visualise how the PTMF aligns with the psychological tools and approaches that many EPs are already using and how we can ensure that we are harnessing these tools in the service of practice that is genuinely anti-oppressive and emancipatory to support one of the key aims of the initial PTMF authors, ‘The different perspective [in the PTMF] allows us to see much more clearly the links between distress, social inequalities and social injustice.’ (Boyle & Johnstone, 2020).

### Recommendations for using the PTMF in practice

<b>1. Getting started</b>	Access the literature (see the BPS website, reference list in this paper). Find your allies – using a strengths-based positive psychology approach, do ‘what works’, which includes finding allies and champions to work with (this may include consideration of strategic developments the service, interest groups, or peers to reflect together and develop your narrative in articulate the PTMF for you in practice)
<b>2. Use the framework to talk about the role of power in people’s lives</b>	Power is so easily missed from therapeutic approaches and conversations. Without considering the way that power has operated in someone’s life, we could be missing a root cause for the causes of distress. The PTMF gives us a useful tool for promoting those discussion.
<b>3. Be prepared to adapt the framework depending on your audience</b>	Though the ideas in the framework are relatively straightforward, to a layperson they do need some explaining. Using models like the porcupine model to explain the link between challenging experiences (the soft underbelly) and threat responses (the spikes) can help to clarify these ideas and make them more accessible
<b>4. Use the framework to consider the PTM factors for all stakeholders</b>	Everyone has experienced the misuse of power in their lives and so everyone has their own set of threat responses. It is helpful to consider the framework from the perspective of all parties in a system: teachers, pupils, parents, staff – and beyond. This can help to empower everyone to understand how power has operated in their lives – and how they may be using power.
<b>5. Patience!</b>	The PTMF is not a quick-fix therapy or pill. It is really a philosophy of human motivation and behaviour. It takes patience and commitment to the principles for change to happen – it will not happen overnight. It is perhaps more useful to think of the PTMF as a new lens through which we can see ourselves and others more clearly. Therefore, the important part is what happens next – what do we do with this new way of seeing?

Table 2. Summary of recommendations for using the PTMF in practice

### Final word

We close this paper with a summarising quote, followed by a guest comment from Professor David Harper who contributed towards the development of the PTMF.

The following quote relates to reflection on our professional values and the implications of our language and actions to promote social justice and anti-oppressive practice,

Carefully watch your thoughts, for they become your words. Manage and watch your words, for they will become your actions. Consider and judge your actions, for they have become your habits. Acknowledge and watch your habits, for they shall become your values. Understand and embrace your values, for they become your destiny. (Mahatma Ghandi)

### Guest comment by Professor David Harper

One of the most enjoyable aspects of being a contributor to the Power Threat Meaning Framework (PTMF) has been seeing the way it has inspired work in diverse areas of practice – for a recent review see Gallagher et al. (2024). I was pleased to hear from my UEL colleagues that they were interested in applying the PTMF in educational psychology practice and it's inspiring to read about the creative ways in which they have done this. I am sure that the examples in this article will be useful to educational psychologists and to others working with children, young people and their social networks.

The authors' reflections on how to make the ideas in the PTMF accessible to a range of audiences including young people, teachers and MDT staff are valuable and hopefully young people themselves will find it helps makes sense of the difficulties for which they seek help. As the authors note, the framework can inform formulations collaboratively developed with staff. The work reported here reminded me of a study by Faye Nikopaschos – a UEL DClinPsych graduate – and her colleagues where they used the PTMF as part of a broader trauma-informed approach on in-patient wards which appeared to be associated with significant reductions in incidents of self-harm, seclusion and restraint (Nikopaschos et al., 2023). The recommendations here about how to use the PTMF in practice are very helpful and resonate with the findings of a recent study by Dilara Omur (2023) -- another UEL DClinPsych graduate – which suggested that the framework helped clinical psychologists make conceptual and institutional changes though it needed to be adapted to make its ideas more accessible.

As the article reminds us, staff themselves are enmeshed

in networks of power and, although the PTMF can aid therapeutic work, it is also important to consider how society can make the structural changes necessary to address the inequalities of power associated with adversities (Harper et al, 2022a, 2022b) and the PTMF might be a useful resource in such an endeavour (Harper, 2023).

### Acknowledgements

With thanks to Professor David Harper and Emma Hanson for their support with this paper and for being our allies.



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