

**SOCIAL RULE; A  
STUDY OF THE WILL  
TO POWER**

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Social rule; a study of the will to power by Elsie Clews Parsons

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TO POWER**



*By Elsie Clews Parsons*

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The Family

Religious Chastity

The Old-Fashioned Woman

Fear and Conventionality

Social Freedom

Social Rule

# Social Rule

A Study of the Will to Power

By

Elsie Clews Parsons



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# Social Rule

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## THE SATISFACTION FROM THE SOCIAL CATEGORIES

IN any study of the relations between personality and social classification the queries arise why the social categories are alike so compulsive to the conservative-minded and so precious, why they are given such unflinching loyalty, why such unquestioning devotion? To offset the miseries they allow of or further, the tragedies they prepare, what satisfaction do they offer? Do they serve only as measures against change, as safeguards to habit,—this is the answer I once suggested,<sup>1</sup>—raising barriers between those most apt to upset one another's ways, the inevitably unlike, the unlike in sex, in age, in economic or cultural class?

<sup>1</sup>Parsons, Elsie Clews, *Social Freedom*, p. 104, New York, 1915.

The social categories are no doubt a safeguard against the innovations personality untrammelled would be up to, and this protection is by no means a trifling social function; but the categories, it now seems to me, perform a positive as well as a negative service, they are an unparalleled means of gratifying the will to power<sup>1</sup> as it expresses itself in social relations. The classified individual may be held in subjection in ways the unclassified escapes. "Being women, eat crumbs!" a Chukchee may exclaim. A woman who dares talk back hears, "Since you are a woman, be silent!"<sup>2</sup> Besides, a would-be woman rebel is kept in her place the more easily if her rebellion mean "unsexing" herself, for both sexes will be arrayed against her.<sup>3</sup> Similarly a refractory junior will

<sup>1</sup> Since I shall make considerable use of this phrase, I would suggest that, like any other popular catch-word, it is harmless as long as it is recognised as a mere verbal convenience; but that it is a constraint upon thought when sociological authority is imputed to it. I therefore beg the reader to take it always in this discussion as a descriptive and not as an explanatory term. It is descriptive of that "general inclination of all mankind" which Hobbes calls "a perpetual desire of power after power that ceaseth only in death."

<sup>2</sup> Bogoras, W., *Mem. Amer. Mus. Nat. Hist.*, VII., Pt. II., 547, 548. Leiden and New York, 1907.

<sup>3</sup> Margaret Fuller once described very neatly the sometime value of sex classification to Anglo-Saxon husbands. "It has