

Shrink Rap Radio #519, August 18, 2016, The Power Paradox
David Van Nuys, Ph.D, aka “Dr. Dave” interviews Dacher Keltner, PhD
(transcribed from www.ShrinkRapRadio.com by Kat Bautista)

Introduction: Today, my return guest is UC Berkeley professor Dacher Keltner, who was my guest back in 2009 on Happiness and Health. Today we’ll be discussing his 2016 book The Power Paradox: How We Gain and Lose Influence. Now, here’s the interview.

Dr. Dave: Dacher Keltner, welcome back to Shrink Rap Radio.

Dacher Keltner: It’s good to be with you, David.

Dr. Dave: Well, it’s good to have you on the show again. I think I heard about this latest book of yours when I caught a piece of your interview on the radio with Terry Gross on NPR’s Fresh Air.

Keltner: Uh-huh.

Dr. Dave: And, of course, she’s the gold standard in interviewing, so I’m glad to follow in her footsteps, and also congratulations to you for showing up on her radar. (laughs)

Keltner: Thank you.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, because it’s not everybody who ends up there. Well, I was happy to have the opportunity to interview you back in 2009 on happiness and health...

Keltner: Yeah. Yeah.

Dr. Dave: ...and that particular interview was pretty much in the context of Positive Psychology...

Keltner: Yeah.

Dr. Dave: ...which was just coming on strong at that time. And your new book, The Power Paradox, that’s the new title, How We Gain and Lose Influence, that seems to lie in a somewhat different domain.

Keltner: Yeah.

Dr. Dave: Maybe you can give us the context for that.

Keltner: Sure. Well, David, for the past 25 years I’ve really studied 2 different things with science.

Dr. Dave: Oh.

Keltner: The first is happiness and health, like you say...

Dr. Dave: Okay.

Keltner: ...and that led to my first book, *Born to Be Good*, and it really is about compassion and awe and laughter and all the things we talked about. But just as importantly and in some sense more timely today, I've long been interested in hierarchy and rank and...

Dr. Dave: Mm-hmm.

Keltner: ...what happens to the human being when they come from a lower-class background, like the people that I grew up around, or why does power turn us into what looks like sociopaths and make us abuse the very privileges that come with power. So that line of work that I've been working on for the past 25 years on power led to *The Power Paradox: How We Gain and Lose Influence*, my newest book.

Dr. Dave: Interesting. So you've had this line of research that had been going on parallel...

Keltner: Yeah.

Dr. Dave: ...to the other research that you were doing. That's fascinating. Well, in a sentence or two, and I limit you here because the topic is ongoing through the book...

Keltner: Sure.

Dr. Dave: ... – in a sentence or two, what is the paradox that you refer to in relation to power?

Keltner: Yeah, it's so striking, the power paradox is that we gain power in almost every imaginable group by advancing the interests of other people through empathy and generosity and things like that...

Dr. Dave: Okay.

Keltner: ...but once we feel powerful, we lose those very skills that got us power in the first place, and we behave in impulsive, often cruel ways.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, as the old saying goes, absolute power corrupts absolutely?

Keltner: Yeah, exactly.

Dr. Dave: Yeah. Yeah. So, I think many of us would say that we're not into power.

Keltner: Yeah. Yeah.

Dr. Dave: A lot of people would say that. But you say that power is about making a difference in the world, which I – I don't think that's what immediately comes to mind for most people, so tell us a bit about that.

Keltner: Yeah, thanks for asking that, David. In a way, that's one of the most important projects of *The Power Paradox*, this book, is that we've long thought of power as something that we want to avoid. And in fact, when I was a young person, I thought, "Well, the world would be better if there wasn't hierarchy, if there weren't power differences or people didn't get interested in power." And I think that's because, for several hundred years in Western and American history, power has largely been about force and violence and so forth. But really the nature of power is changing and we have to rethink what power is, and so in *The Power Paradox* one of the first things I do is say, "Look, power used to be about force and coercion and Machiavellianism, but today, it really is about making a difference in the world and lifting up other people's interests." And what I found really inspiring is just to encounter all these people in history who have really made profound differences through lifting up the interests of others, people like Thomas Clarkson, who wrote an essay about the abhorrent conditions of people on slave ships that led to the abolishing of slavery. So, power is not just force, it's really about lifting up the interests of others.

Dr. Dave: Okay. You made a reference in the book to the philosopher Bertrand Russell...

Keltner: Yeah.

Dr. Dave: ...who I recall being enthusiastic about as an undergraduate...

Keltner: Yeah.

Dr. Dave: ...and I think the conversation was about symmetry versus asymmetry in relation to power?

Keltner: Yeah. And I'm so glad you bring that up. I mean, Bertrand Russell was this great philosopher in the 20th century and did a lot for mathematical philosophy and how we know things, epistemology. And he has this really interesting essay on power that really inspired my entire thinking about power as about making a difference in the world, where he said there are asymmetrical forms of power, right? A fascist rules his citizens, denizens or what have you – and then there are symmetrical forms of power where we have balances of power. And what Russell said at the end of that essay is power is like energy in physics. It's just the basic medium in which we interact with others. And so what that tells us, David, is if you believe that power is just fundamental to our connections with other people – when I parent my children, there are very clear power dynamics. When I'm dealing with my romantic partner or living with her or him, there are clear power dynamics. There are power dynamics at work, there are power – in communities. So, we really have to broaden our thinking about what power is.

Dr. Dave: Okay. So, you describe 4 principles in relation to making a difference in the world and making a difference in our relations with other people, and maybe you can take us through those 4.

Keltner: (laughs)

Dr. Dave: I hope you have your book nearby, so...

Keltner: I don't, so I'm going to grab my book while we talk.

Dr. Dave: Okay.

Keltner: Yeah, so what I did in – and forgive the emotion here...

Dr. Dave: Oh, this is great that you can carry it with you and...

Keltner: (laughs)

Dr. Dave: (laughs) ...you could do some ethnographic research here.

Keltner: Yeah. So the first idea about power that I take on in *The Power Paradox* is what we've been talking about, David, which is that power isn't simply politics and finance, and it's really a condition or quality of our relationships to all people. So it's part of every interaction. And so the first 4 – what I try to do in *The Power Paradox* is say, "Look, there are 4, 5 big questions we can ask about power, and let me reduce those big questions to 4 scientific principles that come out of scientific study that help us understand power." And so I'll just summarize these principles and just elaborate. The first of the 4 principles is what is power, right? Is it money? Is it politics? Is it military force? And I try to broaden it. I say, "Look principle 1: power is about altering the states of other people." Right? If you're in a street in a city and you're kind and you assist somebody, you have an opportunity for influence there. You're altering the state of another person.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, it's interesting that you use the word "state." So you're talking about maybe their – how they're feeling, their emotions...

Keltner: Exactly. What they think about. How do we look at the recent revelation in gender, how we think about gender. That is a very powerful development in human history. It's just this broadening and opening of our understanding of gender, and that really began with ideas, right? It's not money or force that led to that cultural change, it's altering the state, emotions, thoughts of other people. Then what I go on to say is, and it really is the next two principles, are really, "Look, don't think of power as just things happening in politics or very rare circumstances. It is part of every interaction, you and I right here, when I go to meet with my students in an hour, and so on. Power is found in everyday interactions." Right?

Dr. Dave: Right.

Keltner: Just these subtle social behaviors – I was at a conference about environmentalism and the environment. The recycling movement in California in many ways began with a trash collector saving stuff and then reusing it, right? He saw that people were throwing out a lot of stuff. It's just an everyday interaction – he starts saving the stuff and recycling it – that led to this big social change. So power is part of every interaction and found in very subtle social behaviors or everyday social behaviors. And then the final principle in this set, principle 4 is the best way you get power is by empowering other people. It's by giving them opportunities.

Dr. Dave: Yeah. So your thinking – and the book really works on 2 levels. One is the interpersonal day to day...

Keltner: Right.

Dr. Dave: ...experience of regular people...

Keltner: Yeah.

Dr. Dave: ...and then our ability to rise in influence with them...

Keltner: Yeah.

Dr. Dave: ...in positive ways, mostly.

Keltner: Yeah.

Dr. Dave: And also the larger scale...

Keltner: Yeah.

Dr. Dave: ...the societal level and the global level, you're also applying these ideas as much as possible to that level as well?

Keltner: Yeah, well, a really keen reading, David. So it's funny, when I started studying power and I was reading political science and economics and hearing about politics in finance markets and capital, and that's what they thought power was, and I'd come home and I was parenting a 4-year-old and a 2-year-old (laughs), and those felt like power dynamics, right?

Dr. Dave: Yeah.

Keltner: (inaudible) and I'm like, "We don't have a theory of power that helps us make sense of the personal side to it." And that's why I did these studies of how power is face to face and found in everyday interactions. So yeah, very personal, but then I do believe that a lot of the principles in the power paradox not only apply to your friendship or your

marriage or your work life, but also at the international level. What is the status, stature of the United States in international politics? Why is Donald Trump falling so precipitously in the polls? Right? So I think these principles apply at multiple levels of analysis.

Dr. Dave: I'm glad that you mention the name Donald Trump.

Keltner: (laughs)

Dr. Dave: Because that's something that comes to mind right away as we...

Keltner: Yeah.

Dr. Dave: ...start talking about power, and I think of the Hillary Clinton–Donald Trump thing and Putin, and so if anything comes to mind as we're going along, I know that's not the central thrust of this book, but if examples in that domain come to mind, feel free to throw them in.

Keltner: Sure.

Dr. Dave: So another thing that you say is that power is given, not grabbed. Speaking of Putin... (laughs)

Keltner: Yeah.

Dr. Dave: Yeah. Power is given but not grabbed, yet that would seem to fly in the face of so much that we read in today's newspapers. So tell us a bit about that.

Keltner: Sure, so the first big idea of the power paradox is that power is really about altering the states of other people. Can you make them happier or more (inaudible) or have new ideas about looking at the world? Second I think core idea of the power paradox, and it covers the next 4 principles, is that power is given to you. We intuitively talk about grabbing power or taking people down and rising in the ranks, but in most social contexts that your listeners will face, or be in, more typically power is given to you, in the respect people direct at you, the status that they hold you in, or the esteem they hold you in. Do they think you're worthy of the group? And what a lot of different studies are showing, it's very sensible, is that groups, my daughter's peer groups, my academic society, your listeners, how political groups in different parts of the world give power to individuals to the extent that they show that they're interested in advancing the interest of others. So second big idea is power is given, not grabbed.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, you mentioned my listeners, and I have to say obviously I wouldn't be doing this without listeners. And they give me so much positive feedback that it keeps me going...

Keltner: Yeah.

Dr. Dave: ...at basically pretty much for free. (laughs) And so now here I am in my 11th year of doing these interviews. So...

Keltner: Congratulations.

Dr. Dave: ...it's a very powerful thing, that kind of attention that my listeners...

Keltner: Yeah.

Dr. Dave: ...your students...

Keltner: Yeah.

Dr. Dave: ...grant us. You mentioned your research, and one of the things you talk about in this section of the book are what you refer to as natural state experiments.

Keltner: Yeah.

Dr. Dave: Can you give us an example of one of your natural state experiments?

Keltner: Yeah, so by natural state, it's this old idea that philosophers often turn to, which is if you just put a bunch of people together without history and societal roles and so forth, what do people do? How do we behave in our natural state? And I got really interested about 20 years ago in when you bring a bunch of people together, who gains power, who gains the respect of the people around them? And we did these kinds of studies. So what we would do, David, is we'd find a dorm at a university and the first day of school we'd find out what everybody thought of each other in the dorm and we'd follow them over the course of the year, right?

Dr. Dave: Yeah, yeah.

Keltner: And see who's got a lot of respect at the end of the year. We did a study of kids at a summer camp, and a lot of your listeners have probably been at summer camps, and had that experience of like, "Wow," after a week or so, we have these different roles in the group and different degrees of respect, and what we found in these natural state experiments, which are in the second part of the book, is that it isn't the manipulative Machiavellian who gets power and respect...

Dr. Dave: Hmm.

Keltner: ...it's really the person who is engaged in the interests of other people, right? Who brings people together, who directs resources to them, makes them laugh, has these engaging qualities to them, who rises in the ranks. So power is given to those who give to the group.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, that's fascinating. I'm struggling with it a little bit in the light of an interview that I conducted just prior to this this past week, where research was cited that in the high school context, the kids who are rated as the most popular turned out to be the highest status but do not have the most friends.

Keltner: Yeah.

Dr. Dave: So they were high in dominance.

Keltner: Right.

Dr. Dave: How does that fit with what you were just saying, if at all?

Keltner: Yeah, well, first of all you have to be really careful in looking at what the measures really capture, and it may be that the popular high-status students, when you look at that measure of dominance, part of it is social engagement and then part of it is also wanting to control and have power. So we want to look carefully at the measures. And then we also think about the context. Power shifts over the developmental trajectory, and...

Dr. Dave: Mm-hmm.

Keltner: ...high school may be a little bit more raw politics of more domineering types of power. But I will tell you – it's interesting, there are other studies of high school students showing, for example, that the more generous sharers tend to have higher status and actually get more dates in high school. So these are – there are often conflicting findings that we have to pull together in a synthetic way, but in general, across about 70 or 80 of these natural state kinds of experiments, it really is the socially engaged, energetic, more open sharing person who rises in social hierarchies.

Dr. Dave: Okay. You've got 4 principles that you list in relation to power not being grabbed but given...

Keltner: Yeah.

Dr. Dave: I've got them in front of me so you won't have to go to your book...

Keltner: (laughs)

Dr. Dave: ...and I'll just run through them quickly. Well the first one of particular interest is advancing the greater good...

Keltner: Yeah.

Dr. Dave: And you are the director of a center...

Keltner: (laughs)

Dr. Dave: ...maybe we'll talk about it if we have time at the end, but you're director of a center called The Greater Good Science Center.

Keltner: Yeah.

Dr. Dave: And it occurred to me that – the greater good, what a wonderful concept that is.

Keltner: Yeah.

Dr. Dave: And it's not a concept, it's not a phrase, I know I heard the phrase before the Greater Good Science Center came, but not very often. I think some of the older philosophers referred to that idea.

Keltner: Exactly right.

Dr. Dave: But it doesn't come up in everyday conversation. I don't hear our politicians talking about it...

Keltner: Yeah.

Dr. Dave: ...as much as I think they should.

Keltner: I agree.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, so I guess I want to stroke you for bringing that so front and center back into our language and our thinking.

Keltner: Thank you.

Dr. Dave: So I really like that.

Keltner: Yeah.

Dr. Dave: And let's see, you also talk about reputations influencing a person's power. There's status and esteem, and a negative thing that you mention is that people will gain status actually if they punish efforts at undermining the greater good...

Keltner: Yeah.

Dr. Dave: ...and particularly negative gossip.

Keltner: Yeah.

Dr. Dave: But somewhere else, interestingly...

Keltner: (laughs)

Dr. Dave: ...you talk about that you're not wholesale against gossip. You say that gossip actually plays an important role in our social life.

Keltner: Yeah, as you're seeing with Donald Trump, right? I mean, Trump has engaged in all kinds of unethical behaviors and wildly inappropriate behaviors, not only in the public eye but in every imaginable context, and as a culture we're seeing the media and other Republicans resorting to taking down his character through media portrayals and gossip and critiques and so forth. Well, the core idea here, David, is this idea of how is power given to you, right?

Dr. Dave: Mm-hmm.

Keltner: And it really began in my thinking about this question of how groups give power to individuals began, like you nicely observed, in this old concept of the greater good. And the concept of the greater good is the idea, and I think it is almost a unique – well, it's very powerful in the human species for certain, is – it comes out of 18th and 17th century Enlightenment philosophy in the United Kingdom, which had this idea that actions that we can engage in, that are the virtuous actions, are things that we do that lift up the welfare of the most people possible. Right?

Dr. Dave: Yeah.

Keltner: If you do a show and it lifts up the spirits and predilections of tens of thousands of people, that has a higher greater good score, if you will.

Dr. Dave: Sure.

Keltner: And it turns out, we tend in our social groups to give status, to give power to people who engage in these kinds of actions, right? That lift up the welfare of many. So when you go to hunter-gatherer societies, for example, the people who have the highest status in hunter-gatherer societies are those who give away the most food to the people they live with.

Dr. Dave: Hmm.

Keltner: I mean, it's amazing...

Dr. Dave: Yeah.

Keltner: ...so the most generous have the greatest power in hunter-gatherer societies. You find that in different kinds of studies with other human groups, and so that led to this idea that it's really when we honor the interest of as many people as possible, we'll rise in social power.

Dr. Dave: Yeah. And you emphasize such things as empathy...

Keltner: Yeah.

Dr. Dave: ...giving, expressing gratitude and telling stories that unite.

Keltner: Yeah.

Dr. Dave: ...that's an interesting one, telling stories that unite. Then again, I'm thinking of the opposite in terms of Donald Trump...

Keltner: Yeah, unbelievable.

Dr. Dave: ...he's telling stories, but they certainly are not stories that tend to unite.

Keltner: Yeah, and it's so amazing, David, when you look at people who rise to power, and I'm talking about hunter-gatherer societies, presidents of the United States, people at work, kids in schools, people who are members of a spiritual group, they tend to have these qualities, right? They share really well, they empathize, they're spectacular listeners. So one of the things that commentators on Abraham Lincoln observed was he was just a gifted genius at listening to common people. And that was the core of his power. They express, they tell stories that unite, and I'm so glad you brought that up, which is in many ways political elections are about who has the narrative, right? Is it going to be Trump or Clinton who unites the most Americans in a sense of common cause, and that's what I think what Trump is failing so spectacularly right now.

Dr. Dave: Yeah.

Keltner: So these qualities are ancient social behaviors, really things you could do everyday that earn you the respect and esteem of the people around you.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, I think – we know that stories are so important...

Keltner: Yeah.

Dr. Dave: ...that narrative of, we're wired to respond to narrative and to value it. I'm thinking of in election campaigns they talk about, as you say, getting control of the narrative...

Keltner: Yeah.

Dr. Dave: And that there are these spin doctors in political campaigns...

Keltner: Yeah.

Dr. Dave: ...and in corporate life. Something comes out that's negative for a company and right away they've got somebody there to try to spin it, which really just affirms the importance of the story and what that story is saying to the larger group. How people will hear it will greatly affect their perception.

Keltner: Yeah, absolutely, and you can see this in the political realm, right? There is this hungry middle class in the United States and lower middle class that wants a story that says, "We're going to lift up the welfare of the non-one percent." We did these studies, David, like we studied social groups of people joking around with each other and we had them tell funny stories about each of the members of their group, and it was really the great storytellers, right? Who told stories that not only were funny and provocative but united the people around core values, those people had a lot of power in their group. So storytelling – not only is it entertaining but it's a great pathway to power.

Dr. Dave: Yeah. Yeah. And I think about some of the people that I have valued most as personal friends...

Keltner: Yeah. Yup.

Dr. Dave: ...a lot of it had a lot to do with storytelling...

Keltner: Yeah.

Dr. Dave: ...they would tell their story and if they were a good storyteller, that's the kind of person I'm drawn to. And so I'm hearing the story of their adventures and their misadventures, and...

Keltner: (laughs)

Dr. Dave: ...and I can identify with that, and of course I'm giving them good listening, but they also give good listening back.

Keltner: Yeah.

Dr. Dave: Which is really a requirement for having a friend.

Keltner: Absolutely.

Dr. Dave: I find I go to various social occasions and I tend to be a pretty good listener as a psychologist, and a research person and so on...

Keltner: Yeah.

Dr. Dave: ...so a lot of people are really happy in a cocktail party or something to tell me their story...

Keltner: (laughs)

Dr. Dave: But they don't turn it around and say, "Well, tell me about you."

Keltner: (laughs)

Dr. Dave: You rarely run into – I rarely run into that.

Keltner: Yeah.

Dr. Dave: I don't know what your experience has been, but we need more people like that.

Keltner: I agree, and our culture needs these stories that are about uniting our collectives, right?

Dr. Dave: Yeah.

Keltner: And it's a hungry time for that part of our culture, I agree.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, yeah. And I'm thinking of narrative therapy too, that there's a whole approach to therapy, to the healing of the psyche, if you will, that's based on construction of a story that makes good sense of one's life.

Keltner: Yeah.

Dr. Dave: Instead of casting it in a negative light...

Keltner: Yeah.

Dr. Dave: ...it's full of strengths and potentials.

Keltner: And in fact, David, this principle that you find great power in telling great stories that unite came out of those kinds of insights from narrative therapy, which is that if I can now engage the people around me in storytelling, about the work we do, right? Or what we give to our society or what values really matter to us in the funny entertaining qualities that stories have. If I can do that storytelling with my groups, I inspire my groups to do better where they have a better sense of their identity, right? So what applies to the individual mind, great storytelling, also applies to power dynamics in social groups.

Dr. Dave: Yeah. Yeah, definitely. Now, not surprisingly you do have a chapter on the abuses of power.

Keltner: (laughs)

Dr. Dave: And so tell us about what kinds of abuses are you...

Keltner: Yeah.

Dr. Dave: ...talking about and maybe you – I probably don't need to ask you for examples since they're so abundant that if any come to mind.

Keltner: Well, I mean, it's so striking if you – that Lord Acton nearly a couple hundred years ago – you said, and you nicely quoted him, David, he said, "Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely." And we knew that as a cultural truism and I thought, "Well" – and you see everyday examples of it in politicians, in Anthony Weiner and Bill Clinton, and Donald Trump is just a walking textbook example of the abuses of power, racist behavior and sexist behavior and unethical tendencies in his business, and so forth. I mean, it doesn't take very much hard work to find this in the public realm, but what my lab was interested in is can you find abuses of power, does just feeling powerful for any of us, right? For me, does it make me act in unethical and problematic ways? And the definitive answer is yes, right? So, just to show a couple of experiments, we find, for example, that power, feeling powerful or feeling above people produces compassion deficits. You stop caring about other people. In one study, we brought really wealthy people to the lab, less wealthy people – they saw, as a version of our power – way of studying power – we showed them images of people who are – babies who are starving or had cancer, and lower-power people, with less money, had a stronger physiological reaction to suffering than the wealthy. Power produces compassion deficits. We've done a lot of work on how power makes you really impulsive. So...

Dr. Dave: Hmm.

Keltner: Power makes people swear at their friends, swear at their colleagues, act unethically. We did this famous study called the Cookie Monster study where we brought 3 people to the lab, and we told one person they were in power. They proceeded to do a variety of tasks for an hour, and then in the middle of the study we put a plate of cookies in front of the 3 people. Everybody took one cookie and ate it very happily. We had one last cookie on the plate and we were wondering who would take that cookie.

Dr. Dave: Yeah.

Keltner: It was the high-power person who took the cookie.

Dr. Dave: Uh-huh.

Keltner: And we studied how they ate, and the high-power person was more likely to eat with their mouth open, lips smacking...

Dr. Dave: (laughs)

Keltner: ...cookie crumbs falling off their sweater. So everywhere you look, power...

Dr. Dave: Sounds like an additional show of their power and disregard for how they're seen...

Keltner: Totally.

Dr. Dave: ...other than these signs of power. And this is – I'm now picturing primates...

Keltner: Yeah.

Dr. Dave: ...and I know you talk about some primate things in your book.

Keltner: Yeah, I mean a lot of this came out of looking at Frans de Waal's work and other people studying the social hierarchies of primates, and one of the laws of non-human primates is if you're the dominant alpha female or male, you get most of the goods in that group, right? You get more food, you get first access to food, your kids do better, you have more sex. You just get to behave how you want to behave and express the impulses you want to express. And I started to look at those findings and think, "Wow, that sounds a lot like human societies."

Dr. Dave: Yeah, really. (laughs)

Keltner: (laughs) So it wasn't that hard to document that regrettably power corrupts and often absolutely.

Dr. Dave: What about bosses? Have you studied bosses at all because...

Keltner: (laughs)

Dr. Dave: ...we could be talking about bosses in this context.

Keltner: Yeah, one of the really great things is as we started to do this work on power, for the last 15 years, other researchers started to ask these kinds of questions. And so Christine Porath, who was at USC, did a lot of work on bosses and, David, it's not a pretty picture, which is that in I think about 20 different organizations that she studied, if you want to know who swears at other people, who interrupts them, who stops paying attention to them, who leaves a mess on the table and expects them to clean up, 3 out of 4 times those rude, uncivil behaviors are produced by bosses and managers. So it's the same thing. Once I have power as a manager, I tend to forget my more ethical tendencies.

Dr. Dave: Yeah. And somehow that's not surprising to hear that.

Keltner: (laughs)

Dr. Dave: So you talk about deficits of empathy...

Keltner: Yeah.

Dr. Dave: ...self-serving impulsivity, you just spoke about...

Keltner: Yeah.

Dr. Dave: ...the impulsivity involved – there was another thought that went through my mind that I've just lost, I can't remember what it was. Maybe it'll come back. Incivility and disrespect...

Keltner: Yeah.

Dr. Dave: ...exceptionalism, talk to us a bit about – narratives of exceptionalism you cite as...

Keltner: Yeah.

Dr. Dave: ...a form of power corruption, I guess.

Keltner: Yeah. You could think of this in a sense as one of the most insidious abuses of power, right? Is these narratives of exceptionalism. So we know from hunter-gatherers, from a lot of different evidence that people are pretty egalitarian. Humans are a more egalitarian species. In hunter-gatherer societies, we tend to share prolifically, under fairly equal conditions in terms of resources. In studies of over 20 different countries, when people have a resource, they'll share about 40 percent with a stranger. That's our default tendency, but in the past 12 to 15,000 years, a lot of archeological data suggests we've moved towards greater hierarchies, right? To the point where what Bernie Sanders talked about, which is today we have such a really profound hierarchy in the United States in terms of economic capital and educational opportunity and the like. And that rubs us the wrong way, inequality, and what happens is people in positions of power, to justify their elevated positions, will start to tell stories I call narratives of exceptionalism that instead of uniting people, they separate people. They divide people. They privilege the people at the top compared to the people at the bottom. Stories like in the Victorian era, wow, the Victorian English were the superior culture or race and genetically different and more superior to other cultures. Stories like in the United States, only a hundred years ago there was a eugenics society that really felt that white people were superior to people of other ethnicities. I even think that these narratives of exceptionalism apply to gender biases, right? "Well, women can't lead, they don't have that leadership stuff," which turns out not to have any scientific validity. So our society's always telling these stories, especially coming from people at the top, about how special people at the top are, and I wrote that part of this chapter to really take those stories on and say, "They're just a bias," right? And they need to be challenged.

Dr. Dave: Yeah. Speaking of stories that unite, something that just popped into my mind is I've been watching the Olympics...

Keltner: Yeah.

Dr. Dave: ...and part of the reason why I like it, why I watch it, is there's such an uplifting narrative around it.

Keltner: Yeah.

Dr. Dave: Even in the context of people who are competing with one another, but the overall story of it being that, "Hey, we're all humankind and here we are together" and we hear about stories of athletes who become friends across country and ethnic borders...

Keltner: Yeah.

Dr. Dave: ...and that's just one of the most inspiring things that we have going. My wife remarked just this morning, "I'm going to be sorry when the Olympics are over."

Keltner: Aww. Yeah.

Dr. Dave: (laughs)

Keltner: Well, that's your job, David, is to tell more of these stories. I mean, when you look at the most inspiring movements of social change, they're very often – revolve around stories that unite, right? Abraham Lincoln's work during the civil war, the free speech movement and the civil rights movement, the more recent gender equality movement are all in a way centering on this idea that we all have this common humanity, and once you bring that into focus and in some very specific ways, you have a chance to influence.

Dr. Dave: Yeah. Yeah. And that idea that I lost a while back, it came back to me...

Keltner: Yeah.

Dr. Dave: ...I wanted to ask you, somewhere in the book you talk about the science of power in a way that suggests that you're not the only person researching this.

Keltner: Yeah.

Dr. Dave: Is there in fact – is this an emerging field within – you're a social psychologist – is this emerging particularly within social psychology, or what's going on?

Keltner: Yeah, and it's so interesting, David, I began this work 25 years ago, I actually was really interested in shame, and why I was studying shame in my work on emotion coming out of my involvement with Paul Ekman. And shame, when I saw people experiencing and expressing shame 25 years ago, it looked like a state of submissiveness, right? Of just weakness and humiliation, not surprisingly. And we didn't have the social psychological theory of what does that feel like? What's running through your thought patterns, right? What does submissiveness do to my social behavior and my nervous system? And so we wrote a paper, now 13 years old, coming out of that work on the social psychological study

of power that's at the heart of this book, The Power Paradox, and since then it's been one of the biggest growth areas in social psychology. There are dozens of labs studying power, a lot of the principles that I talk about in the book have been replicated dozens, hundreds of times...

Dr. Dave: Mm-hmm.

Keltner: ...so it is a very robust area of inquiry, is to think about what does power do to the human psyche.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, well, it's amazing that given that there are so many areas that it touches upon...

Keltner: Thank you.

Dr. Dave: ... – I've got your book here which I'm holding up to the camera. It's a relatively thin book, although it's packed with a lot of good research examples and examples from your own life. That must have been fairly challenging to figure out what...

Keltner: (laughs)

Dr. Dave: ... – how to prune this big field down, in a way, to communicate in a compact fashion like this.

Keltner: Well, the original version was twice as long and my editor did some very spectacular work.

Dr. Dave: Okay. (laughs)

Keltner: (laughs)

Dr. Dave: Now, you seem to have a very positive view of human nature.

Keltner: Yeah.

Dr. Dave: And some might accuse you of being naïve or wearing rose-colored glasses...

Keltner: Yeah.

Dr. Dave: ...but I note that the New York Times reported that neither the Hillary Clinton nor the Donald Trump campaign have focused on the 49 million people in this country who live in poverty...

Keltner: Yeah.

Dr. Dave: ...and interestingly, that's a big part of your focus with a chapter on powerlessness.

Keltner: Yeah.

Dr. Dave: Do I say "Dacher Keltner for president"? (laughs)

Keltner: (laughs) Thank you. Although I was born in Mexico, so I can't (inaudible)... (laughs)

Dr. Dave: Well, I think maybe being born in Mexico – and there was another neighborhood that you talk about that you grew up in...

Keltner: Yeah.

Dr. Dave: Where people were poor...

Keltner: Yeah.

Dr. Dave: ...and that seems to have really conditioned you to be sensitive to that dimension.

Keltner: Yeah, David, thanks for bringing that up. So when you write a book, you're very often searching for – in a way it's a personal inquiry, right? And you're thinking, "Why do I do this, 25 years of science? Why am I writing this book right now, getting up at 5 in the morning?" And it was really interesting, I kept thinking back to this experience that I had in my personal life, which is that I was living in the late 60s in Laurel Canyon, Los Angeles. My mom was getting her PhD and then she got her first job at Sacramento State University as a teacher, professor. And my mom and dad moved us to this rural town in the Sierra Nevada where it was in one of the poorest counties of California and we were in the poorest town in the poorest county in California. And we moved from a middle-class neighborhood with good schools to a neighborhood of poverty, right? And I'm forever grateful for that unusual experience. The neighborhood had this warmth about it, this altruism, this – you could show up at anybody's dinner table and there was a plate for you, right?

Dr. Dave: Yeah.

Keltner: And we ended up studying in our lab how the poor share more what they have than the very wealthy, than the 1 percenters.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, I've heard people tell stories of going to another country where there was a lot of poverty...

Keltner: Right.

Dr. Dave: ...but people would insist that this traveler share food with them.

Keltner: Yeah, that's a great example. I hadn't thought of that. But the other thing that struck me, David, is, and it really is – it was really astonishing, I was thinking about the people on the road that I grew up on Kayo Drive and I write about it, person by person, they really were suffering from every imaginable psychological and physical ailment, from massive depression of the dad at the top of the road to agoraphobia. A guy right down the street who couldn't go outside. My best friend Memo Campos – his sister had leukemia, his dad contracted cancer. Couple of houses down the way, a woman died in her 40s. I mean, people were really struggling and we – at the time I couldn't make sense of it, and now 25 years into the science of power we know that powerlessness – if I don't feel like I have a chance at school, if I feel like I'm the target of racist police or sexist bosses, it activates powerless regions of the nervous system...

Dr. Dave: Mm-hmm.

Keltner: ...the stress response, cortisol, inflammation, your problematic immune response, that literally makes it hard to think and starts to shorten your life. And so I thought about the lives of my neighbors and the struggles they face and despite their great intentions, I realized, "Wow, their troubles aren't about character," and not as much even about money as deprived of the opportunity to make a difference in the world, right? Powerlessness.

Dr. Dave: Yeah.

Keltner: And so as I wrote the last chapter...

Dr. Dave: Yeah, and as you pointed out, an impact on their health...

Keltner: Yeah.

Dr. Dave: ...as well as their ability to make a difference in the world. Yes, that's impacted, but also their health.

Keltner: Yeah, David, when I – the mid-90s, 1990s, I was starting to do the science of power at Berkeley and prior to that at Wisconsin and this paper came out by Nancy Adler and her colleagues at UC San Francisco, and it blew my mind, right? It surveyed lots of broad patterns of health data. How long do you live if you get cancer. What happens, with diabetes, to your physical health. Heart disease and so forth. And she found that if you put people on a ten-rung ladder, for every rung down the ladder you fall, even holding constant how much money you have, you're more likely to die from disease, right? So there's something about feeling powerless or below people that really hurts the body.

Dr. Dave: Yeah.

Keltner: And once I've read that it's like "That's why my neighbors on Kayo Drive – even starting in childhood, their health was compromised by powerlessness."

Dr. Dave: Yeah. And then there are counter-examples...

Keltner: Yeah.

Dr. Dave: ...of people who – we've all been exposed to biographies of somebody who just rose above that environment, somehow...

Keltner: Yeah.

Dr. Dave: ...got out of it, became a champion of their people or in some other light made a big impact on society.

Keltner: Yeah. And I think that that, in a way – and thank you for bringing that up, and I wish I'd written more about that, but in a way that's our cultural challenge, right? Because we know in the United States 1 out of 6 people, 1 out of 7, is living in poverty. We know that a lot of kids are hungry, right? And this has been a persistent problem. We've lost the war on poverty from Lyndon Johnson and so we have to think culturally about what allows people to rise despite those conditions. My neighbor Memo Campos, who is my best friend – his family began poor and from Mexico and a lot of barriers, but thanks to the University of California, he did really well. So we have to think very energetically right now about that. One of the reasons I write about in *The Power Paradox* is that we now know that a child who is raised in poverty, because of these effects on the nervous system of – sort of stress response, inflammation response, loses 6 to 10 years of life expectancy just by being raised in poverty. So we've got to figure it out.

Dr. Dave: Yeah. Well, your book really challenges all the readers to do our part to make the world a better place. And so that's a wonderful thing that you're doing there. I know that you're also doing some corporate consulting, Google is one place that you mention, I think, in your bio.

Keltner: Yeah.

Dr. Dave: What can you tell us about your corporate consulting work without revealing any...

Keltner: Sure.

Dr. Dave: ...closely held secrets, corporate secrets?

Keltner: Yeah. Well, most of the work that I've done is with Facebook, and I'm really proud of it. And this is with Arturo Bejar, who is really the leader of this. So 4 and a half years ago I was asked to go down to Facebook, because I've studied compassion, and to try to build in the science of compassion and kindness and respect and do this side of Facebook, which is – now it has 1.7 billion people on it and I'm happy to say as a scientist, I looked at that and I thought, "Here is perhaps the most dynamic, unusual social community ever created, Facebook..."

Dr. Dave: Hmm. Yeah.

Keltner: "...you're communicating with people all over the world in an instantaneous way with the opportunity to share." And we have helped create the tools for people to solve conflicts. If they're fighting with a friend about a photo they've put up, we gave them kinder language to negotiate their conflict. We've helped them redesign the emoticons so that they're more emotionally rich. We're working on how you build an opportunity to express gratitude on the site, and kindness and reach out to friends, so it's this incredible site that needs, in my view, to more energetically pursue more compassionate behavior or enable more compassionate behavior. And then I think that the next step will be to hopefully see it as a means by which you can have greater access to educational tools or what-have-you to redress some of the issues of poverty we face.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, wow, what an incredible nexus of opportunity you have there...

Keltner: Yeah, it is.

Dr. Dave: ...to really make a very large impactful distributed kind of contribution.

Keltner: Just to give you an example, one of the things we know from clinical literature, and I know you know this deeply and intuitively, is if you give people a chance to express a wider range of emotions, right? In their lives, they're going to do better, if you don't suppress certain emotions. And so what we did at Facebook is we created this set of emojis that they can send that allow them to express things like fear or anger or sadness along with smiley and laughing and so forth. And we found in different studies that actually lifted up their well-being, just to have a more emotionally rich language to express themselves, so lots of opportunities there.

Dr. Dave: I remember there was a flak a little while back about research being done on Facebook.

Keltner: Yeah.

Dr. Dave: Was that your research by any chance?

Keltner: It was not.

Dr. Dave: Okay. (laughs)

Keltner: And that was a justified flak – all I helped Facebook with is just taking the science of things like compassion and gratitude and empathy and using those principles for their design, right? So we actually don't do science, we just help them design things.

Dr. Dave: Hmm.

Keltner: So it was (inaudible). (laughs)

Dr. Dave: Are you doing any consulting work with government entities?

Keltner: Well, the thing that I've been really involved with in the – I'm just trying to think about what I do in with respect to government is I'm – I think in that last chapter on powerlessness in *The Power Paradox*, one of the glaring issues in the United States right now is the role that the criminal justice system has in perpetuating powerlessness for African American men – for example, the school to prison pipeline that people have written about, the new Jim Crow, in Michelle Alexander's terms, that we have a way of surveilling and punishing African American men that keeps them in a state of powerlessness. And I feel that's true, a fair assessment, and so what I've been doing – in fact I go tomorrow – is go to San Quentin Prison and participate in restorative justice programs. And then out of that work, I've had the opportunity to write science-based briefs, for example, that argued against solitary confinement in California state penitentiaries that actually won, so just based on the idea that's it's cruel and inhumane punishment. So I'm trying to use this science for ways to remedy features of the criminal justice system, and as part of work in government.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, yeah, we need a compassionate government.

Keltner: We do.

Dr. Dave: Yeah. Can you say a little bit more about that restorative justice at San Quentin? What is it that you're doing there?

Keltner: Yeah. I don't know if you've talked about this in your shows, David, but it again comes out of almost the clinical literature that you're so immersed in. So we have these ancient tendencies, I think they're evolved tendencies, to solve conflicts with people, right?

Dr. Dave: Yeah.

Keltner: So if I hurt your feelings or I did something that harmed you, the intuitive human response – and chimps even show this behavior, is to – I would go to you and I would apologize, and I would express my remorse, and I would give you resources, and other people would help us repair our bond. Restorative justice, right? Where we apologize, take responsibility and seek forgiveness. It's a very deep human tendency, and the criminal justice system prevents that, right? If you're a perpetrator of a crime you most typically don't get to apologize, express your remorse and the like in a systematic way. And so there's this whole philosophy of restorative justice, which is about, in a very clinically sensitive guided way, you lead and you enable people who are in prison or in schools or what-have-you to say sorry for what they've done, right?

Dr. Dave: Yeah.

Keltner: Repair the relationship. So in San Quentin Prison, we go, and they have weekly meetings with people who are really expert in this tradition of just coming to terms with the wrongs they've perpetrated, try to reach out to their victims, make public statements which I see when I visit San Quentin Prison, kind of work through those difficulties and a lot of the data are showing this is a cheaper, much more effective way to deal with criminal problems than punitive forms of justice like solitary confinement.

Dr. Dave: Right. Yeah. Yeah. That's wonderful work. Well, I mentioned earlier that you're director of the Greater Good Science Center at UC Berkeley. Do you want to just tell us about the mission of that organization and your work there?

Keltner: Yeah, thanks, David. I think that's why you and I first started talking. Yeah, so 15 years ago, what Jason Marsh and I wanted to do with the Greater Good Science Center – Jason directs the programs there – is to take all this science of empathy, gratitude, storytelling, awe, compassion that I write about in *The Power Paradox* and really give it away to people in actionable, readable non-academic ways, because who likes to read academic papers? I don't.

Dr. Dave: (laughs)

Keltner: I don't read my own papers. So we created a website, greatergood.berkeley.edu. It has several million readers, we have...

Dr. Dave: Wow.

Keltner: ...features for educators, we have hundreds of teachers coming in worldwide each summer to learn about the science of empathy or compassion for their classrooms. We now have a – a part of our web offerings is practices that promote happiness and health. It's called Greater Good in Action which is ggia.berkeley.edu. Or you can go and test out an awe walk or a compassion exercise. So it's really about enhancing the greater good in all kinds of people.

Dr. Dave: Well, I love your work...

Keltner: And it's all free. (laughs)

Dr. Dave: I love your work. I love what you do. I feel that my greater good has been enhanced in this interaction between us. And is there anything else you'd like to say as we wind down?

Keltner: Well, I wanted to thank you, David, I always deeply enjoy our conversations, and hope they continue, and I'd encourage your listeners to check out *The Greater Good*, it's free and your audience is who we built it for, and let us know what they think.

Dr. Dave: Okay, well likewise. Well, Dacher Keltner, I want to thank you for being my guest again today on Shrink Rap Radio, and let's not make it the last.

Keltner: I agree, David.