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The Context of Addressing Power Dynamics in Service Design

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Abstract

To support transformative aims, scholars highlight a crucial need for increased attention to power dynamics in service design (SD). Current literature emphasizes the need for individual service designers to build reflexivity around power without much consideration for their surrounding context. This narrow focus may inadvertently reinforce existing power dynamics while using service designers as scapegoats for the persistent problem. Drawing from ecological theories in psychology, this article provides a framework for understanding the contextual factors that contribute to the lack of reflexivity around power dynamics among service designers. Based on our own experiences and a review of SD literature, we used this framework to identify domains of contextual factors that inhibit service designers to address power dynamics in practice. By proposing a systemic framework and identifying related contextual factors, this study helps to provide grounding for future research and action within the service design community regarding the structural changes needed to address power dynamics.

Keywords: Power, Reflexivity, Contextual factors, Ecological psychology, Service Design

Introduction

Service design (SD) is increasingly regarded as a promising means for transforming service systems (Koskela-Huotari et al., 2021). The expectation is that SD's humancentered and collaborative approach can foster bottom-up change that enhances well-being and promotes equitable access to services (Anderson et al., 2018; Fisk et al., 2018; Sangiorgi, 2011). However, to achieve these transformative goals, scholars emphasize the importance of addressing power dynamics and redistribution within service systems and SD practices (Sangiorgi, 2011).

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This focus is reflected by the following articulation in a recent article on power literacy in service design by Goodwill and colleagues (2021, p. 54): "the main challenge identified here is the designer's lack of awareness, sensitivity to, and understanding of how power dynamics and differentials affect stakeholders, the relations between them, and the social issues addressed in and through design". A similar sentiment is argued by Sangiorgi (2011, p. 29): "designers are urged to introduce reflexivity into their work to address power and control issues in each design encounter".

Along the same vein, Penin and Tonkinwise (2009) emphasize the necessity for service designers to grasp the political complexities at work in service provision. In a recent discussion between Penin and Tonkinwise, Penin (2018, p. 138) poses the question, "Why is it important for designers to maintain an awareness of the issues of power, class, and gender when designing new service provision?". Although we share a great interest in these questions, we wonder if such phrasing and focus might inadvertently hinder progress in addressing the pertinent issue of power dynamics in service design.

Karpen, Holmid and Yu (2021, p. 1) argue that "expectations on service designers are rising". Simultaneously, numerous challenges have been acknowledged in developing reflexivity around power for service designers, such as delayed awareness and struggles to overcome personal biases (Goodwill et al., 2021). Furthermore, attempts to realize power shifts through the adoption of participatory approaches in service design, reveal scant evidence of realizing such shifts (Donetto et al., 2015).

This narrow focus on individual service designers' responsibility to build reflexivity around power dynamics risks reinforcing existing power structures while attributing blame to the practitioners for the persistent problem. To avoid using them as scapegoats, we propose a need for a more systemic understanding of the factors contributing to this lack of reflexivity and, consequently, the capacity to address power dynamics in practice. A more systemic perspective can help identify multiple mechanisms beyond reflexivity that hinder addressing power, and thus inform necessary structural changes that better promote equitable outcomes in service design. Therefore, the aim of this exploratory paper is to contextualize why it is so challenging to confront power dynamics in SD. This contextual focus aligns with the larger systemic turn in service design (Koskela-Huotari et al., 2021; Sangiorgi & Prendiville, 2017; Vink et al., 2021) but has not yet been a part of the discourse concerning reflexivity around power.

In this article, we begin by introducing ecological theories from psychology, which offer frameworks that highlight the reciprocal relationship between people and context. We then outline our exploratory research approach, inspired by

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mysteryfocused research. Subsequently, we share the insights derived from analyzing SD literature and our own experiences through the lens of framework informed by ecological psychology. Lastly, we discuss how these insights can serve as a foundation for a more contextual understanding and structural actions that address power dynamics in design practice.

Drawing from Ecological Theories in Psychology

To build a more contextual understanding of service designer's disengagement with power dynamics, we draw on ecological theories from psychology which are commonly used in developmental and community psychology (Jason, 2016). These perspectives seek to understand people within their contextual environment and promote change in aspects of the context that impede its actors' abilities to take control and improve their lives (Trickett, 2009). Specifically, we adopt Bronfenbrenner's (1977, 1979, 1986) ecological systems theory to inform our analysis. Initially developed as a framework to study human development through the lifespan, this theoretical framework embraces a reciprocal understanding of how individual behavior adapts to, and influences one's environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). As the focus is not exclusively on persons or context but on their transactions and relations (Trickett, 2009), this framework is particularly helpful in connecting individuals and context, enabling an examination of them through a unified lens that emphasizes their interconnectedness.

Ecological Systems Theory

Uri Bronfenbrenner (1977, 1979, 1986) provided ecological systems theory as a framework to study how individuals are influenced by and influence their ecological environment throughout their lifespan. The ecological environment, Bronfenbrenner claims, is "conceived as a set of nested structures, each inside the next, like a set of Russian dolls" (1979, p. 3). The model is visualized in Figure 1. The immediate environment, termed the microsystem, encompasses significant actors and institutions an individual interacts with, such as family, friends, workplace, and their neighborhood. Bronfenbrenner emphasizes that individuals engage in direct reciprocal interactions with these actors and settings, with their subjective experiences shaping both their own behavior, development, and their environment.

Ecological systems theory's primary contribution has been its incorporation of indirect factors that influence an individual's life, development, and actions. As a second layer in the model, the mesosystem consists of the relationships between different microsystem parts, which indirectly affect the individual. For example, a child may be

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influenced by conflicts between parents, or an inclusive living environment may emerge from positive relationships among neighboring families.

In addition, the theory emphasizes the continual influence of societal factors that also are interconnected with individuals, represented by the exo- and macrosystems. The exo-system encompasses major societal institutions and infrastructure that "surrounds" the micro- and mesosystems, setting the scope of for their activities. Examples are mass media, government agencies, transportation facilities, and informal social networks.
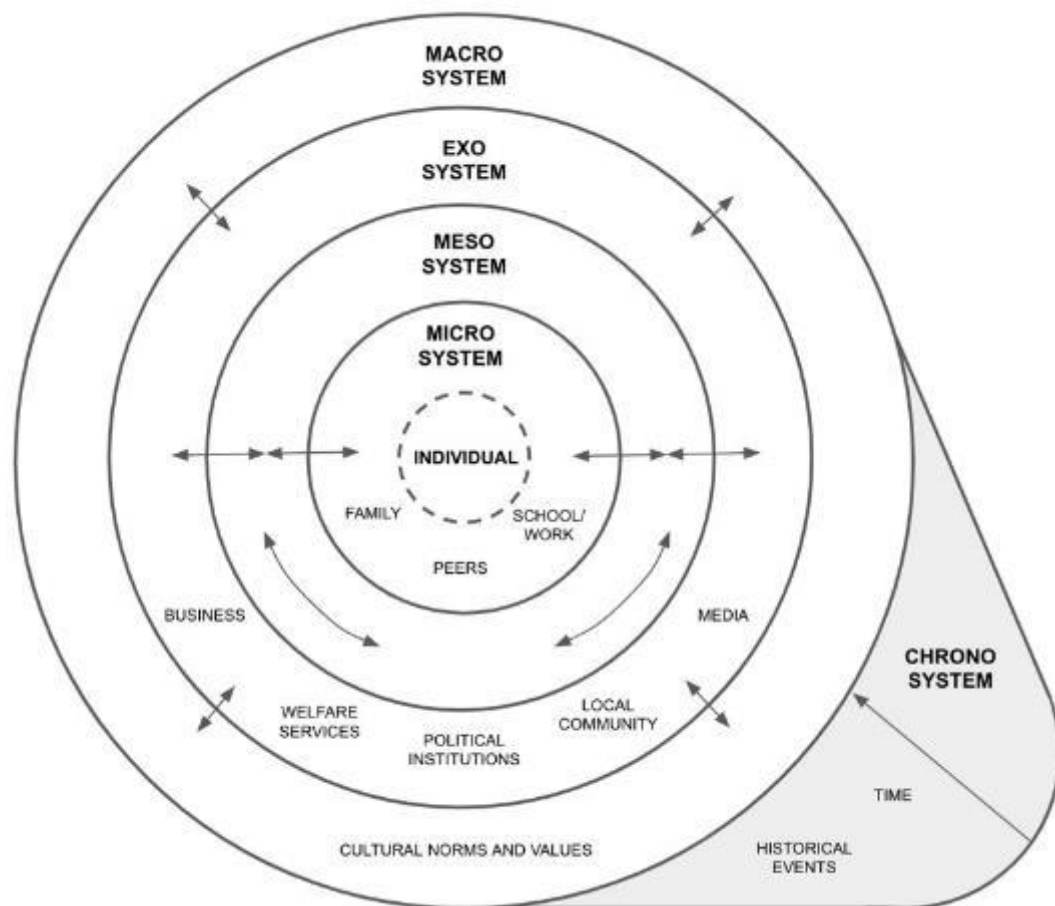

Figure 1. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems model

The outermost layer of the model, the macrosystem, refers to the institutionalized and often implicit cultural norms and social structures that permeate and shape societal institutions and infrastructure. Examples include ideologies, religions, and economic systems. These refer to the typically intangible factors that set the pattern for the structures and activities in the micro-, meso- and exo-system. Finally, all current layers of systems are built upon a chronosystem, which represents time and

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history. With this, the theory also emphasizes that historical events and developments affect all elements of a given ecology (Bronfenbrenner, 1986).

The ecology of a service designer

In our exploration, we embrace Bronfenbrenner's notion that "the properties of the person and of the environment, the structure of environmental settings, and the processes taking place within and between them must be viewed as interdependent and analyzed in systems terms" (1979, p. 41). To understand these interdependencies in a service design context, we adapted the model to the setting of a service designer, as visualized in figure 2. The examples provided in the adaptation are based on the authors' experiences, and thus only serve as examples as the setting of each practitioner may vary.
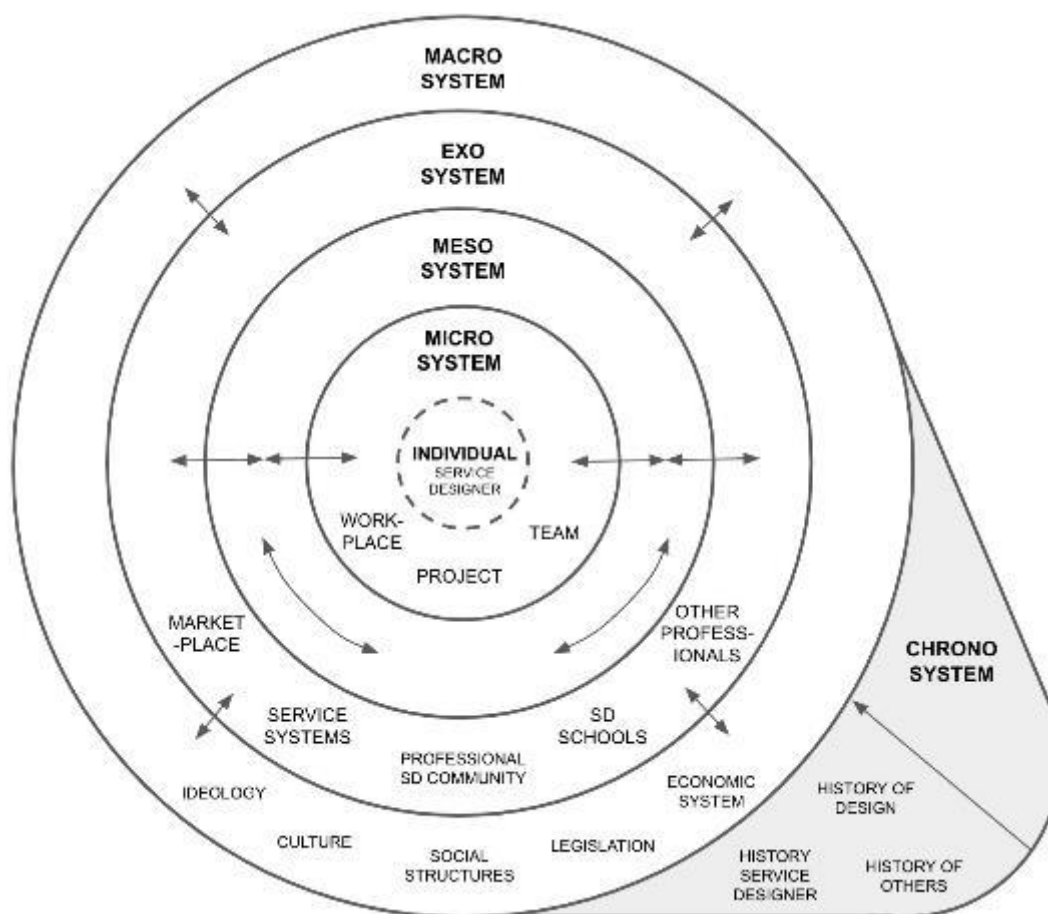

Figure 2. Ecological Systems Theory adapted to an SD context by the authors

The service designer's microsystem is the setting they interact directly with, such as their workplace, current project, and design team. The mesosystem encompasses processes and interactions within or between the layers, such as how projects get

funded or how a team is selected for specific projects. The service designer's exosystem comprises a range of actors, organizations, and communities indirectly affecting the work of the SD practitioner. Examples include the general marketplace for SD, the service systems in which the practitioner designs in, global and local professional SD communities, SD schools and other non-design professionals working in the same domain as service designers. The exo-system is embedded in the macrosystem, which consists of factors such as the ideology, culture, legislation, social structures, and economic system of the given context.

Exploratory research approach

To examine how a contextual viewpoint could enhance our understanding of why service designers exhibit limited reflexivity regarding power, we undertook a preliminary conceptual analysis to open this alternative perspective. In doing so, we drew inspiration from a mystery-focused research approach (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2007), which posits that theory development is stimulated by selectively examining phenomena that do not align with existing theory. These discrepancies between observations in practice and theory serve as mysteries that can challenge current assumptions in the discourse (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011) through incorporation of theories from other fields as well as the researchers' expectations and interpretations. The "mystery" in this research lies in the persistent issue of inadequate attention to power dynamics in SD practice, despite ongoing emphasis on this subject over time. To support this exploration, we integrated insights from ecological theories, SD literature and our personal experiences (visualized in Figure 3). This integration was carried out through a recursive sensemaking process, wherein we sought to understand how the inaction in addressing power dynamics could "fit" within its situated ecological context.

We actively incorporated our own experiences into our analysis, in accordance with a mystery-focused research approach. This approach emphasizes the potential for researchers' subjectivity to serve as a driving force in challenging existing theories and developing better ones. The first author has a background in clinical psychology, both academically and professionally, and has spent seven years utilizing ecological frameworks in family therapy settings. The second author has over a decade of experience working in complex service systems, such as healthcare. We used these perspectives in a dialogic manner throughout the analysis to question and reframe assumptions and beliefs found in the SD literature, as well as each other's perspectives.

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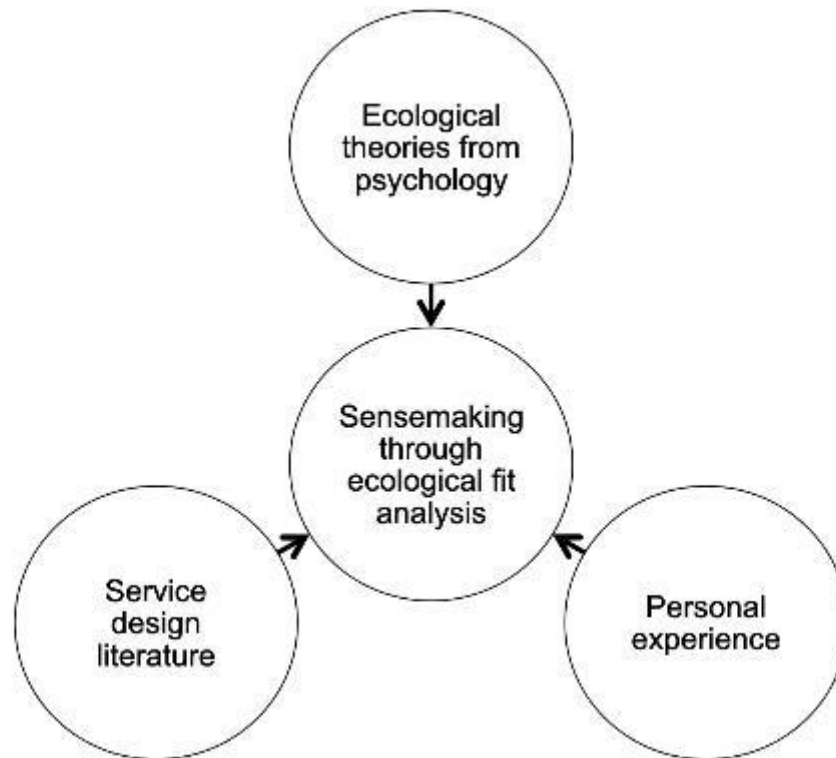Livework

Figure 3. Integration of SD literature, ecological theories from psychology and our personal experience in an exploratory ecological fit analysis

To explore the persistent inaction to address power dynamics, we engaged in sensemaking utilizing a fit analysis based on the ecological systems model. Often used in systemic interventions in psychology (Henggeler et al., 2009), an ecological fit analysis seeks to understand how a phenomenon makes sense in the context it appears in. Through such efforts, one can discover how an action or inaction that at face value seems problematic can serve as a functional solution for the individual, given the environment in which they act. Our aim, thus, was to investigate if the inaction (not confronting power) could *fit* within its ecological context.

To support the analysis, we drew on the seminal ecological psychologist James Kelly's (1968) three core principles of interdependence, adaptation, and succession. The principle of interdependence implies that various components of the social ecosystem mutually influence one another, and that a change in one component can alter relationships among others. Adaptation refers to the idea that people adapt their behavior to be beneficial in their environment and that the environmental demands also change if people within the environment change their behavior. Finally, Kelly emphasizes that social systems are continuously evolving, implying a successive development in what is adaptive behavior for the people involved. While these principles partially overlap with Bronfenbrenner's theory, they also provide valuable

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explanatory mechanisms for understanding the interaction between people and context (L. Jason, 2016; Jimenez et al., 2019).

We started our fit analysis by defining the mystery of the ecological fit analysis as "service designer does not confront power." The contextual factors were interpreted from SD literature and our own experience. In addition to academic articles on service design, we also considered articles and reports from popular discourse, such as the practitioner-focused service design journal, Touchpoint. Throughout the process, we integrated and organized perspectives from the literature and our experiences using the ecological systems model as a lens. Through interpretation, these perspectives were defined as ecological factors on post-it notes and consecutively placed in the appropriate layers of the Bronfenbrenner model. Following this, akin and closely connected factors were assembled into distinct contextual domains surrounding the individual service designer. This resulted in the identification of distinct proposed domains of relevant contextual factors as depicted in the process photo below (figure 4).
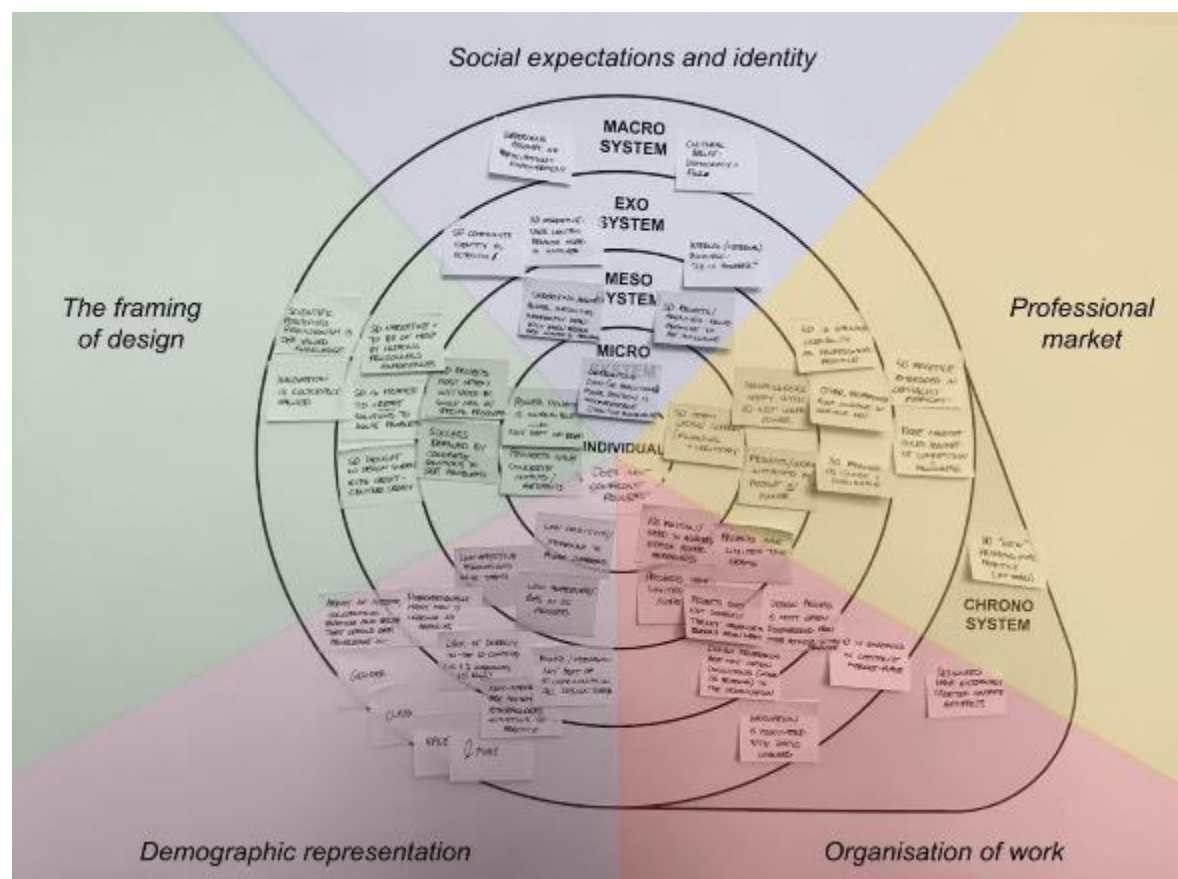

Figure 4. Process photo from our ecological fit analysis with identified factors and domains related to the SD practitioner's inaction to confront power dynamics.

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During the process, we discovered that our tailored inventory of domains, associated factors, and their interconnections, facilitated a more contextual comprehension of the phenomenon. In the following section, we delve into the insights obtained from this exploratory process. These insights highlight how something that has been discussed rather simply in service design is quite complex and that this phenomenon of individual reflexivity is much more systemic.

The ecological fit of inaction to confront power

Our analysis led us to identify the domains and factors summarized in Table 1. We distinguished five separate contextual domains, which we labeled as follows: 1) the professional market, 2) the framing of design, 3) demographic representation, 4) social expectations and identity, and 5) organization of work. Within each of these domains, we identified proposed contextual drivers derived from both the literature and our own experiences. In some cases, the literature explicitly mentioned these factors, such as Akama & Prendiville (2013), who discuss how a problem-solving focus in service design is reinforced by SD being taught in design schools with an object-centered legacy from other disciplines. In other instances, we indirectly interpreted factors from perspectives and assumptions in the literature, such as using statistics from Leitch and colleagues' (2021) report on the state of service design in the US to understand factors within the demographic representation domain. Some identified factors overlapped, indicating their presence in multiple domains, particularly at the macro level, where, for example, the embedding in a capitalist logic was a factor in both the professional market and organization of work domains. Given the exploratory nature of our inquiry, the table should therefore be viewed as our interpretation of the SD context rather than an absolute truth.

Domain	Description	Proposed contextual factors	Literature informing interpretation
Professional market	SD practice is embedded in a professional marketplace that shapes and restricts the scope and contents of its practice.	*Macro:* ● SD practice is embedded in a capitalist market ● The free market holds the consumption that competition leads to progress *Exo:* ● SD is gaining credibility as a professional practice ● Other professionals also engage in service development ● SD is framed as unique, and values-based *Meso:* ● SD projects are initiated by stakeholders holding power ● Stakeholders are pleased with SD providing frictionless outcomes *Micro* ● SD teams risk losing support (financial and legitimacy) if they challenge power dynamics.	(Fayard et al., 2017; Mager, 2016; Penin & Tonkinwise, 2009; Seravalli & Witmer, 2021; Zomerdijk & Voss, 2010
The framing of design	The way SD is framed inherently carries and drives expectations about what service design can and cannot do	*Macro:* ● Scientific and positivistic reductionism is the primarily valued knowledge ● Innovation is culturally valued *Exo:* ● SD holds a narrative of being of help by creating frictionless experiences ● SD is framed to create solutions to specific problems ● SD is taught in design schools with object-centered legacy	(Akama & Prendiville, 2013; Ansari, 2018; Blomkvist et al., 2016; Clatworthy, 2011; Duan et al., 2021; Joly et al., 2019; Secomandi & Snelders, 2011)

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(Cont.)		*Meso:* ● SD projects are most often initiated by single organizations aiming to improve specific problems ● Success in SD projects is defined by concrete solutions made *Micro:* ● Power dynamics are intangible and not a part of the design brief ● Projects tend to aim for concrete outputs/innovations	
Demographic representation	The demographic representation in the SD community comes with biases and blind spots that influence SD practice.	*Macro:* ● An array of systemic sociopolitical practices and beliefs uphold differences in privileges based on gender, class, race and more. *Exo:* ● Disproportionally many men are leading SD agencies ● Lack of diversity in the SD community ● Actors with privilege are predominantly initiating SD projects/initiatives ● Power and oppression are not part of the curriculum in all SD schools *Meso:* ● Low affective associations with power inequities in SD teams/agencies ● Bias in SD community around awareness and importance of power inequities. *Micro* ● Low sensitivity to power inequities	(Fonteijn, 2023; Goodwill et al., 2021; Leitch et al., 2021; ZIPPA, 2022)

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| Social expectations and identity | The SD community's internal culture and narrative come with certain social expectations. | *Macro:*

 • Cultural belief that democracy is fair
 • Underlying assumption that participation equals empowerment

 Exo:

 • SD community has an identity of altruism (design for a better world)
 • SD holds the promise of being user-centric by including users in the design process
 • Internal (and external) discourse around SD being powerful

 Meso:

 • An underlying assumption in projects is that power inequities are dealt with when people are invited to the process
 • SD projects/agencies hold promise to be inclusive

 Micro:

 • Confronting own power (as SD practitioners) is uncomfortable as it opposes the SD narrative | (Fayard et al., 2017; Goodwill et al., 2021; Kimbell, 2011; Sangiorgi, 2011; Wetter-Edman, 2014) |

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| **Organization of work** | The setup of SD practice, most often conducted in projects by external or internal design teams, imply a position and frame that further determine its scope and process.

 . | *Macro:*

● SD is embedded in a capitalist marketplace
● Innovation is associated with rapid changes

Exo:

● Design processes are most often disembedded from other activities in the organization
● Design professionals most often work as consultants (internal or external) to the organization

Meso:

● Projects do not directly target the organization's current design legacy
● Projects have a limited timeframe
● Projects have a limited scope

Micro:

● SD team is not a part of strategic decision-making in organizations
● No position or need to address or expose power-hierarchies | (Junginger, 2015; Karpen et al., 2017; Leitch et al., 2021; Seravalli & Witmer, 2021; Yu & Sangiorgi, 2018) |

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Based on principles from systemic interventions in psychology (Henggeler et al., 2009), we refined the factors in each domain, aiming to be as concrete and descriptive as possible. Finally, we established relationships between interdependent factors, examining how they might influence one another.

By labeling, sorting, revising, and connecting the drivers, we identified potential feedback loops of systemic adaptation. We define these feedback loops as a mechanism in which an individual's behavior adapts to interdependent systemic factors across multiple levels of their ecological environment, while the individual's behavior, in turn, reinforces the factors in the same ecology. In the following section, we will focus on the domains we labeled "the professional market" and "the framing of design." By outlining two of the five identified contextual domains, we aim to illustrate how we used the framework to understand the relationship between individual actions and contextual factors in SD practice.
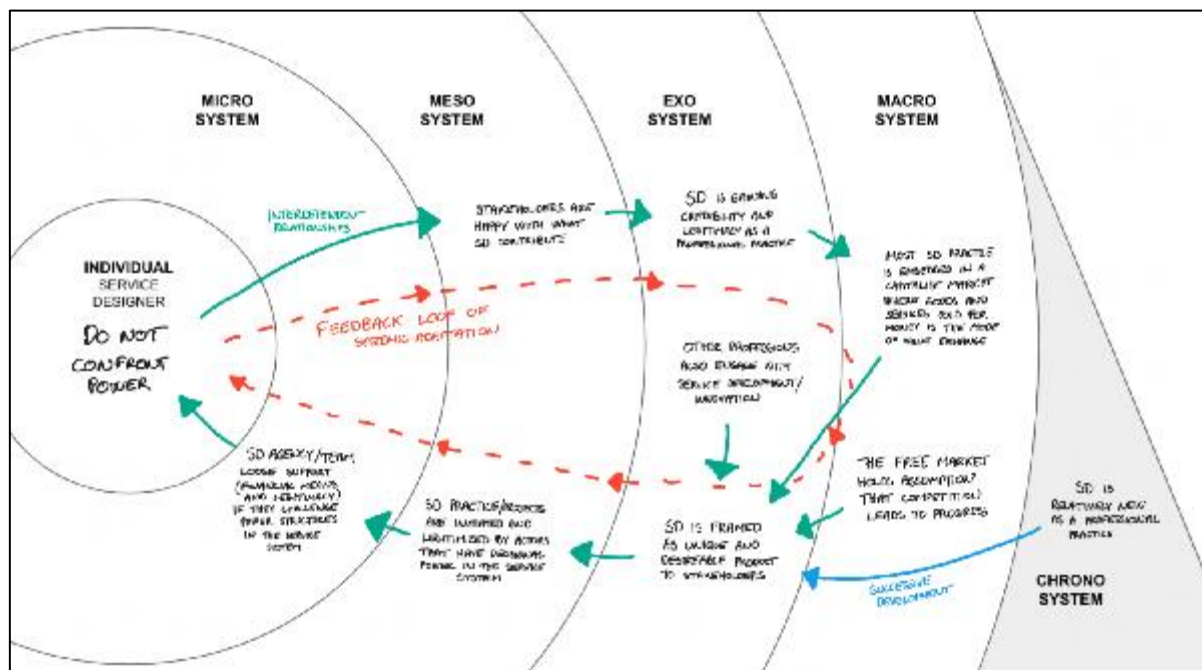

Figure 5. Successive development, interdependent relationships, and feedback loop of systemic adaptation of the inaction to confront power in the professional market domain.

Figure 5 presents a proposed feedback loop related to the professional market in which SD practice is embedded. As SD is a relatively new professional practice (chrono) embedded within a capitalist market (macro) that assumes that competition leads to progress (macro), SD needs to be framed as a unique and desirable product to stakeholders (exo). This is further reinforced by marketplace competition from other non-design professionals involved in service development (exo). Moreover, SD must be supported and legitimized by stakeholders with decision-making power for

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SD initiatives or projects to happen (meso). If the SD agency or team challenges the decision-making power of these stakeholders, they might risk losing financial resources or legitimacy to do their work (micro). Therefore, an adaptive behavior is to not confront power dynamics, which in turn reinforce the stakeholders' satisfaction with the contribution of the SD work (meso). In broader terms, this consolidates SD as a credible and legitimate professional practice (exo) in the capitalist market (macro).
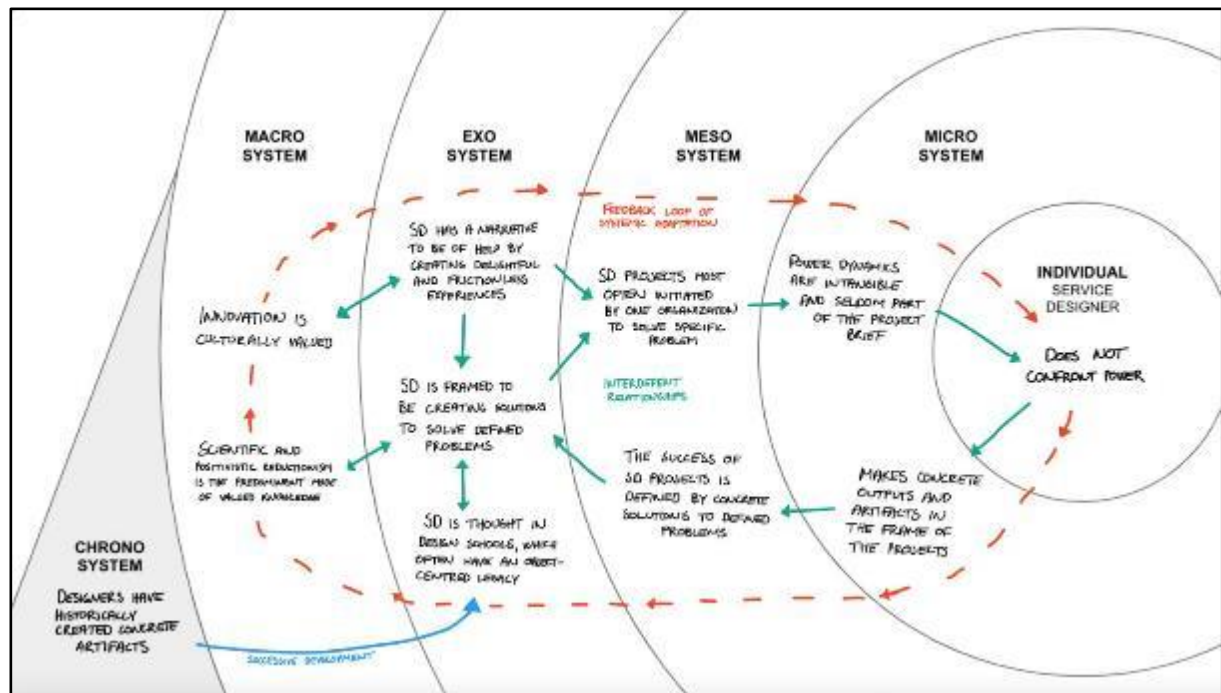

Figure 6. Successive development, interdependent relationships, and feedback loop of systemic adaptation of the inaction to confront power in the *design framing* domain.

Another proposed feedback loop, related to the framing of SD, is visualized in figure 6. As SD is framed to create solutions for defined problems (exo), it is a good fit in a Western culture that holds scientific and positivistic reductionism as the predominantly valued mode of knowledge (macro). The solution-focused framing of SD is also mutually reinforced by SD being taught in design schools that often have an object-centered legacy (exo). This legacy is based on the idea that most designers traditionally have created artifacts of concrete materials (chrono). Also, we note that SD has a narrative to create new solutions that imply less friction (exo), which is a good fit in a culture that assumes innovation as progress (macro). The framing and narrative surrounding SD further lead to SD projects being initiated by one organization to address a problem they encounter (meso), which in turn becomes the focus of the project brief (micro). Since the brief rarely addresses power dynamics and differentials, which are intangible by nature, there are few incentives

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for service designers to confront them. Instead, they make concrete outputs and artifacts to create solutions within the frame of the project (micro). As stakeholders evaluate SD projects based on the concrete solutions they contribute (meso), the concrete solutions made are considered a success, reinforcing the framing of SD as a promising way of creating solutions (exo). Ultimately, this consolidation also brings reinforcing evidence to the cultural values of innovation and reductionism (macro).

Discussion of Implications

To contextualize the challenges of confronting power dynamics in SD, we adapted ecological theories from psychology to build an adapted framework that offers a more systemic understanding of the issue. This explorative research contributes to the discourse around power in SD research and practice in several ways. First, the framework initiates a systemic shift in reflexivity around power, acknowledging the numerous factors that impact practitioners' ability to address power dynamics. Second, it suggests a redistribution of the responsibility for confronting power dynamics in SD from the individual practitioner to the collective community. Lastly, this research indicates a strategic and multidimensional approach to working with intentional structural changes related to power dynamics in SD. We discuss each of these three contributions below.

A Multiplicity of Contextual Factors

While the existing literature emphasizes the need for individual SD practitioners to be reflexive about power (Goodwill, et al., 2021; Sangiorgi, 2011), this paper offers a more contextual understanding for the challenges service designers face in cultivating reflexivity and addressing power dynamics in practice. By pinpointing such contextual factors, the SD discourse shifts from focusing on a single underlying reason (individual reflexivity) to providing insights into a multitude of contributing and interdependent factors. This shift acknowledges the insufficiency of merely promoting awareness among individual SD practitioners. This research suggests that reflexivity is situated and necessitates supportive contexts, and that multiple interventions within the broader service design community are needed to address the various contextual factors.

From Individual to Collective Responsibility

While discussions to date generally reinforce the responsibility of individual service designers in addressing power dynamics, our research suggests a more collective approach, redistributing responsibility among various actors in and connected to the service design community. Ecological theories from psychology offer a valuable

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perspective for understanding of how people are embedded in their context and how interactions between them happen. These theories allow for a balanced focus on people, process, and context in focus, rather than one over the others. Viewing an individual's inaction to address power dynamics through a systemic lens reveals that it's an adaptive and understandable behavior in its context. This perspective helps reduce blame and guilt placed solely on the individual service designer, while still acknowledging the responsibility practitioners have in taking joint action to confront inequitable power dynamics. Addressing these contextual factors necessitates not only individual but also collective reflexivity within service design practice. Consequently, we propose that practitioners, scholars, leaders, authors, design organizations, and others all share responsibility for examining their contributions to the persistence of the problem and taking appropriate action to address it.

Strategic Interventions in Context

An important step towards effecting change, in this instance, confronting power dynamics in service design practice, is to understand the systemic context of the phenomenon. By examining and suggesting related domains—such as the professional market, design framing, demographic representation, social expectations and identity, and work organization—along with their associated contextual factors, our research identifies potential strategic interventions that may help create more supportive contexts for reflexivity and action concerning power dynamics. For transforming service systems to be more equitable and sustainable, redistributions of power, like including marginalized groups or future generations, are essential (Fisk et al., 2018). The interdependent relationship between service designers and factors within various context layers informs leverage points for bringing about such transformative change by redistributing power in service systems. Specifically, it gives possible directions to the needed structural changes within the broader service design community, including for example alterations in the business models they rely on or the selection criteria for service design educational programs. Such leverage points in the context of service design can guide related actors towards a more strategic course of action.

We should also acknowledge that efforts are already being made to address power dynamics in service design, providing a foundation to support further contextual interventions. Notably, the ServDes 2020 conference made a strong and inspiring effort to thoroughly unsettle dominant power dynamics in the field (Akama et al., 2022). Furthermore, inspiration can be taken from other design discourses, including the longstanding, ongoing discussion on power and politics in the adjacent field of participatory design (Halskov & Hansen, 2015) as well as broader conversations on decolonizing design (see e.g., Schultz et al., 2018; Tlostanova, 2017). By tapping into some of these ongoing discussions, the hope is that some of the interpretations

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and avenues for further work outlined here can be deepened, nuanced, and challenged.

Limitations and Future Research

As this study was an explorative and preliminary investigation, there are several limitations that require further research to build a more robust, systemic understanding of reflexivity regarding power dynamics in service design practice. The contextual factors identified and their interdependencies were interpreted based on selected literature and our personal experience. Followingly, further investigation is needed to validate and refine these factors and their nuanced relationships. When making sense of the inaction to confront power in service design, we did this from a Western Anglo-European perspective and context, informed by experience working within the service design community within North American and Northern European contexts. Considering the context-specific nature of this analysis, additional research across diverse contexts is necessary, rather than treating these factors as universally applicable. Contextual factors are certainly contextually dependent and need to be understood in their situated setting. Our aim in this paper has been to explore how an ecological framework can build our awareness of contextual factors in a given setting, not identifying universally valid ones.

Moreover, since our analysis was based on selected literature and our personal experience, the domains and associated contextual factors are not all-encompassing or exhaustive. Instead, they serve as examples pointing to a new perspective that we believe is necessary. A more extensive and systematic literature review could help identify other domains and pertinent contextual factors. Although the interpretation was influenced by the authors' experiences in the service design field, this study is not directly based on empirical data, only that which was present in the reviewed articles. A comprehensive field study across multiple service design community sites could further contribute to a deeper and more context-specific understanding of related domains and factors.

Another limitation of the current study is that we employed the specific lens of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory among many possible ecological frameworks (e.g., Ecological Theory; Kelly, 1968, or Social Climate Theory; Moos, 2003). Several of these theorize how individuals interact with their context and would likely have given other perspectives to our inquiry. Even though Bronfenbrenner's model serves as an intuitive and functional framework, it provides a specific lens on the system. Further research applying different lenses and adapted theories could aid in developing a more holistic understanding of this issue. For one, Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory is anthropocentric, without including how humans interact and relate to nature or other species (Darling, 2007; Elliott &

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Davis, 2018). It is also important to highlight that the different layers in this model are analytical separations, not necessarily empirically distinct; for example, culture can be seen as a set of factors in the macrosystem but also as everyday practices and behaviors in the microsystem (Vélez-Agosto et al., 2017).

While this exploratory research certainly has its limitations, it also offers a starting point and a new direction for continued research regarding addressing power dynamics in service design practice. The preliminary domains identified in this research can be opened into more concrete questions for further research and discourse, such as: How does SD's positioning within the professional marketplace inhibit confrontation regarding power within the practice? How is the fundamental framing of design getting in the way of addressing power dynamics in the service design community? How do the current demographics of service design practitioners influence challenges regarding reflexivity around power? In addition, this research opens new questions about what actions are needed to address existing barriers and build supportive contexts for reflexivity and action around power across these and other domains. Rather than letting service designers completely "off the hook", further research is needed around the ways they might work with others within their situated contexts to address contextual factors. Furthermore, additional research is needed to nuance discussions about ethics that take contextual settings into consideration.

A Call to Action

As several scholars have argued, reflexivity around power is a prerequisite for confronting power dynamics. Nevertheless, a myriad of contextual factors influences SD practitioners' inability to confront power dynamics and inequities in their practice, which need to be tackled. To fulfill service design's potential for transformational change and strive for equitable outcomes, we argue that a more systemic approach to addressing the contextual factors within which service design operates is required. Developing supportive contexts for reflexivity and action concerning power involves a joint responsibility among actors within and related to the service design community. Structural changes across domains, such as work organization, market positioning, and design framing, are necessary to achieve the practice's aspirations. Based on this preliminary study, we advocate for additional research and strategic action that shifts the service design community's focus from blaming practitioners to collaboratively establishing contexts for deliberate and systemic confrontation of power imbalances.

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