

Power: Interpersonal, Organizational, and Global Dimensions

Monday, 26 September 2005

TOPIC: Conformity and Influence, then introduction of three forms of power: Manipulation, Persuasion and Force.

Chart from last class:

	Conformity	Compliance
level of influence	peers	hierarchy
nature of response	imitation homogenous performance	follow directives/instructions potential for variation
expectation	implicit	explicit, orders/commands
explanation of subject	claim it was voluntary may vary with different reasons	involuntary no choice under authority

Milgram experiment (illustrated in the film): Subject is placed with two others who are required to shock a participant. But the shock can only be as high as the lowest level recommended from *any one* of the three supposedly conducting the experiment on the fourth person. But the existence of the two confederate others creates a **normative framework** for the (true experimental) subject.

- There is a **dispersion of responsibility** among the three.
- When one of the two others leaves, it shows that **defiance** is possible, so now the subject is less likely to shock. Disobedience is not only possible but it goes *unpunished*.
- For the experimenter (director of the project), **failure to enact/enforce compliance** over all in the group **weakens power** over the individual.

From this we learn how *strong group pressures can counteract authority!* Consider civil disobedience and vigilantes, for example.

Can authority make us conform?

When a legitimate authority supports a given action, the subject will go along, especially if responsibility is dispersed. This shows how the **situational structure** can be manipulated in order to make **submission** more likely.

- If you locate an individual from the surrounding organization, or culture, this **lessens the strain** on him/her, and are less submissive. Janis talks about **groupthink** in his article. The policy makers are isolated in their committees and only have limited input among themselves and their immediate peers – they make decisions they otherwise wouldn't, had they not been isolated.

This genre of research included studies on racism in the American south, as well as concerns about the extent of obedience in Nazi Germany. Scholars wanted to know under what conditions people go along with what they might individually think is wrong. Kelman argued that there are variations in **degrees of conformity**. We should not think of obedience and conformity as absolute differences but as locations on a continuum. He suggested several intermediate stages.

Conformity ←————→ Obedience *Think of it as a continuum!*

***Compliance/obedience** is based on the expectation of **reward or punishment** and also depends on the capacity for **surveillance**.

Consider the stop-smoking' group example: a group member promises not to smoke, but as soon as he steps outside (away from group), he lights up. He complies only in the **group context**, when is being observed by the others in the group.

- **identification** – the desire to be accepted by the reference group
 - a feeling of belonging
 - lasts as long as the relationship continues and remains salient
 - e.g. the employee smokes with boss to gain approval
- **internalization** – the group's agenda is accepted as legitimate because it is consonant with the individual's own values and this persists as long as the subject agrees with those values

***Situational factors** (e.g. time, affect, approval, values) make a difference in the degree of conformity. The extent to which an individual conforms depends on the relationship and the situation. Although the individualism of American culture often encourages us to think that a person's personality determines conformity, the experiments show how we can *affect a person's behavior by changing the social variable - the organization of the situation*.

What qualifies as power? Intention with consequences. What about obedience?

The experiments show how *implicit norms rather than explicit commands and the structure of the situation can* change people's behavior. The ability to use the knowledge of group pressure in order to control others can become a resource for the exercise of power

And conformity can be used to control others and this results in our first type or form of power, manipulation.

MANIPULATION

Manipulation = concealed intention + getting someone to do something (consequence)

Manipulation is a common form of power in social interaction. It occurs when there is a situation in which communication is altered in order to **give a false impression of the actor's intention**. Manipulation is extensive in **interpersonal** relations.

For example – the movie *Catch Me If You Can* in which a man poses as various professions

- people have expectations – since the protagonist wore the uniform and interacted

convincingly, as if he belonged, people reacted as they felt they should, as if he were the real thing

- The "*con-man*" – origin of the word is "confidence man" – the aim was to get people to trust [have confidence] in you and then use that confidence for your own profit.

Manipulation is not limited to face-to-face interactions; it can occur *without* a close relationship. The subject may be unaware that he/she is the object of a power relationship. **Symbolic communication** is employed – veiled suggestions are used to constrain the subject's knowledge. Words/speech are used to misconvey the issue:

- the Clear Skies Act will (purposively, ironically) *raise* atmospheric mercury levels
- 51% of Americans think Saddam Hussein was behind the WTC bombings – which is false – but this is because Bush put Saddam's name next to "terror" in speeches, sending the *symbolic message* that the two went together

Manipulation can also be **situational**, when you alter the subject's environment:

- *market manipulation* – refineries decrease oil capacity even though the flow is sufficient just so they can drive up the market price
- Enron shut down the state power grid to drive California to desperation until the state agreed to contract for power at exorbitant prices

***Manipulation can be either symbolic or situational.**

PERSUASION

Persuasion is successful when the subject accepts the argument of the other as a basis of his/her own behavior. There is no reward, punishment, or inducement – persuasion is instead based solely on **reason, logic, and argument**.

There is **differential capacity** with persuasion – it can depend on personality, ability, skill of the power holder, and vulnerability of the object of power but willingness to go along depends solely on the presentation of the argument.

Control over the means of communication affects the ability to persuade, or manipulate.

- With the media, is intention masked?
- e.g. GE owns NBC – ON November 7, 2000, the CEO of GE walked into the NBC newsroom and told them to call the election for Bush before voting was over and NBC did so even though their polls showed that Gore was leading.

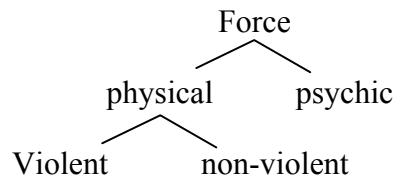
*Persuasion requires very little **expenditure of resources** - other than those already mentioned, ability and skill. Manipulation requires more resources because it maintains two texts. But both are less likely to arouse antagonism and are therefore often the most successful forms of power.

FORCE

Force is customarily defined as the **control over the body**, over the physical person. Action is taken *directly* on the body:

- bodily harm/injury or death – this constitutes the *limiting case* of power - exercises control – with minimal engagement of the subordinate's subjectivity - indeed denies mind and

- focuses on body
- frustrate bodily functions, as is usually done in torture
- create obstacles/restrictions to physical movement



We must distinguish force from **threat of force (coercion)**. Threat involves a communicative relationship – symbolic communication – that acknowledges that the subject of power has a mind and capacities. “Do this or else...” is the threat; the subject retains capacity to evaluate options, makes a **decision**.

Threat of force vs. actual force = holding a gun to head vs. firing

- when you follow through with the threat once, the threat then becomes more real
- e.g. parental displeasure and threat of punishment prevents a child from re-offending (deterrence)

During social interaction, categories get mixed up and in each situation, there is more than one form of power being exercised. The forms, categories, or types of power are analytic categories, what we sometimes call "ideal types," fully conceptualized rather than empirical.

We often associate force with a **total asymmetry**, such as those cases where there is the most inequality of power between parties, e.g. rape, child abuse, capital punishment.

There is a difference between channeling people's action and moving/manipulating their bodies.

◆ **threat of force**

- the exercise of authority includes the *threat* of force (as a type of authority)
- individuality of the subject is *not* eliminated
- the threat fosters the inclination to obey, particularly in an authoritative relationship where the subject just defers to the authority

◆ **force**

- the individual *must* obey – there is a penalty if he/she retains resistance
- force is better for making a subject *not* do something
- eliminates freedom to act and is thus **negatively defined** – what the subject *cannot* do
- can't use force to make subject do complex tasks

*The subject becomes aware of the **future credibility** of the power holder and his/her **will and ability** to use force. There is the *threat* as well as the *fear* of force.

- e.g. Why did the US bomb Nagasaki after bombing Hiroshima? It wanted to prove that there was more than one bomb (even though there were only two), threatening Japan and proving that it had the capacity. Here, force was used to demonstrate capacity but was not used again.

Indeed, bodily manipulation and control are power, but they constitute **violence**. There is also the possibility of **non-violence**, like public demonstrations and sit-ins. In non-violence, people

use their *own* bodies as physical objects to prevent/restrict the actions of others instead of acting on *other* bodies. The actions of others are affected without engaging in a dialogue or interaction of symbolic communication.

- **violent** – *on* bodies
- **non-violent** – *by* bodies

Force can be used to control the action/lives of others by **indirect means**:

- **structure** in minute detail the course of people's lives
- **define the situation**, organize the situation to produce a **desired outcome**
 - produce an organization that is dehumanizing – Goffman talks about the total institution, where there is a constructed situation that controls members' lives almost completely
 - force need not use physical abuse – it can be welcomed, even desired. Control is exercised in a relatively total way.
- **Erving Goffman** – professor of sociology at Upenn, now deceased.

characteristics of a total institution:

1. all aspects of life under a single authority
2. activities are in the presence of a large number of others
3. phases of daily activities are tightly scheduled
4. tied to rational design/plan to meet specific announced goals

Examples of total institutions include prisons, boarding schools, the military, monasteries, concentration camps, homes for the elderly or insane.

What happens in a total institution

- ◆ **total surveillance** is created – everything is done out in the open
- ◆ enormous **asymmetry** between the large number of subordinates and the small superordinate group (a great **social distance** between them)
 - imbalance of resources from the very beginning
 - entire setup is designed to create the imbalance
 - entire organization flows from the fact of oligarchy – surveillance is needed to monitor the larger subordinate population
- ◆ process of **mortification** – whereby an individual is stripped of the self – it kills the *person* but not the *body* (note the distinction of self vs. body)
 - self is portrayed as **undesirable** (e.g. the state hates the prisoner, the monastery seeks to change the self)
 - people become dispossessed of their social **roles**
 - decontextualized from all their relations, social transactions (family, consumer, etc.)
= **civil death**
 - **obedience tests** designed to have immediate punishment and serve as threat afterwards
 - personal **defacement** – stripped of one's signal to the worlds, all one's signs gone
 - sometimes direct, permanent **mutilation** (tattooed numbers, shock therapy, surgery)
- ◆ **territories of the self** are violated – e.g. personal information available to others, undesirable

characteristics exposed, force feeding, bowel control, forced interpersonal contact, searching person/things, mixing groups

- ◆ **contamination** of conduct – authorities invade space (familiarize you to them, using your first name for example, but they remain removed), personalization of subject
- ◆ **individual actor vs. his acts** – “looping” is when one aspect of a person's life is brought up in another, unrelated context
 - there is no separation/severance between actor and action
 - result is that you **can't differentiate between role and person**
 - e.g. Professor Silbey sat on the town's school board, but her opinions were sometimes dismissed with “That doesn't apply here. This isn't MIT.” Because she was a *professor* she couldn't enact the role of *parent or citizen* without the infringement of another role.
- ◆
- ◆ **regimentation** – also called **tyrannization**
 - must obtain permission from the staff, who has control over all the inmates
 - results in a **loss of self-determination** (inmates have no control over their own bodies)

Mortification might be implemented for *its own sake*, e.g. concentration camps, gulags, prisons. Or, it might be engaged for a *specific goal*, such as sanitation, utilitarian purpose, or the desire to have a new self.

If mortification is successful, the **old self is destroyed** often without being given a new self.

- have been disculturated, dispossessed, mortified, **destroyed without renewal**
- this process can be expedient for control
- **however, without a new self, it is difficult to exist outside the total institution**
- →monastery and the military – they *do* get a new self and can often succeed outside

How do people manage to live in total institutions? How do they adapt?

- **peer/secondary adjustments**
 - indulgence in forbidden satisfactions (e.g. playing cards, working out) is evidence that inmate is still in control
 - status within peer groups
 - does not directly challenge the staff
- **personal adjustments**
 - withdraws, more oppositional
 - **colonization** is most common – inmate is mortified, seeks institutional protection from the outside world
 - **converted** – becomes the “perfect inmate”
 - the **loner** who plays it cool – sense of self remains separate

Adjustments illustrate the importance of the group.

The sense of self is the product of the group.

Zimbardo's prison/guard experiment show how there is an asymmetrical relationship between power holder and object which can result in the use and abuse of force. This relationship is *situationally* and not *personally* dependent.

Force (as a form of power)

- constant supervision
- most attempts move from direct force to threat of force
- dehumanizing
- loss of self determination
- disempowering

What we learn: the structure of the interaction, organization of roles, and spatial organization can significantly shape human action.