

Power: Interpersonal, Organizational, and Global Dimensions

Wednesday, 21 September 2005

TOPIC: Continue elaboration of the definition of power, begin discussion of what power is not: influence and conformity.

Review of Simmel:

reductionism – society is the sum of all interactions

relationism – all social life is interdependent

“Power conceals an interaction, an exchange...that transforms the pure one-sidedness of superordination and subordination into a sociological form.”

Failure to recognize this transformation is the **fallacy of separateness**

Both actors in the dyad of superordination/subordination contribute to the power relation. We have to ask what resources are available to each party?

How is the power-holder limited in the exercise of power? Can power have complete control?

- the power-holder can exercise power only over people with whom she has a relationship
- she can exercise power only within the **sphere of action** of the relationship – for example, within the student-professor relationship, the professor can exercise power only within the academic sphere, but couldn't dictate who students should date or what they should buy
- the subordinated has other obligations, e.g. the struggle between work and family – demands of work offset demands of the family, and the boss can only technically exercise power in the office, but office time reduces home time and so the troublesome intersection of the two
- the subordinated must have the **capacity** to execute the power-holder's command otherwise the exercise of power is limited
 - Benjamin Disraeli (?) said, “I am their leader, therefore I must follow them.” Leaders must have an understanding of their followers – they cannot command what their followers cannot do.
- the **scope of control** of the power-holder is limited because they can't cover every aspect of life, sphere of action, can't control/observe everything (note the failures of the USSR, Nazi Germany, and Iraq)

Examples:

- Amazon.com keeps information on a customer's purchases and lists recommendations based on those purchases. But *power* is not exercised unless the customer follows through and buys the recommended products.
 - The use of surveillance cameras is prolific – yet the information is readily available but not routinely used.
- For example, what about resistance in totalitarian society? Rock music was a form of political resistance in the USSR. It worked because music wasn't on the government's radar, so to say – they didn't pay attention to it.

--The power-holder is limited by the existent relationship, the certain spheres associated with it.
--He must have the **will to act on the threat**, must take certain actions lest the ability to have intended effects on the other disappears.
--Law is an example of an **elevated principle** that binds leaders. For example, John Roberts declared, "I have no agenda." The idea is that they are individual judges that don't *make* the law – they are simply *subservient* to it.

*Power must be used in context of the social interactions and is dually its product.

(discussion of handout with the chart of interaction between A and B)

In some exchanges, A is almost but not totally powerful, B still has power (not completely powerless) to deny the superordinate what is intended, by the willingness to die.

- e.g. suicide terrorists– they have the last resource (choice over their death) to deny the power-holder what the latter wants
- e.g. apartheid in South Africa where people died in order to avoid compliance with governmental request

Exploration of power in intimate in small group settings, in everyday life, examples of influence and conformity as well as power.

– the study of the social psychological = the study of individual behavior in groups

Film showing - *Conformity and Independence* directed by Stanley Milgrim

We inhabit two different worlds: **public action** and **private thoughts**. Important questions to ask are: Where do they intersect? How do they diverge?

***Conformity** is when a person **adopts the ambient behavior** because he/she feels that he/she is expected to do so.

There is a difference between a **social norm** and **law** – social norms have no **enforcement** agent, unlike codified/ institutionalized law. Why then do people still go along with norms?

- **anti-conformity** – react against the group but nonetheless use the group as a reference
- **independence** – supposedly acts without respect to the group, but Professor Silbey says this is impossible because there is *no human social action that doesn't take others into account*
- **internalization** - the group's activity becomes one's own
- **identification** – one adopts the norm to be like others

Milgrim's experiment tested **obedience**, in which the subject goes along because he/she *expects a reward or consequence*. This also applies to Zimbardo's Stanford prison experiment in which a group of students were placed in a prison setting, half of them designated as guards, the other half as prisoners. **Authority** was attached to both experiments (e.g. they took place in a university setting). When one doesn't conform to group norms but instead follows **declarations from an authority**, that is obedience!

- **conformity** – no specific control or identifiable agent of control
- **obedience** – compliance under authority

	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

Conformity and obedience work together! We can use *processes of conformity* to get people to obey or act in certain ways. But conformity may also *inhibit* obedience.