Power: Interpersonal, Organizational, and Global Dimensions
Wednesday, 09 November 2005

TOPIC: Power institutionalized.

Review from last time
- transformation in system of power – from control over bodies to control over minds and eventually to control over space
- the shifts of authority that go with this movement from body to mind to space
- shift from exclusion to discipline/normalization to governmenality/freedom to enter space and self-governance

Summary of what we know so far about power
- power as **multiplicity of forces** organized through structured (patterned) interactions
- **omnipresent** – there is nothing that is *not* a power relation; power is **everywhere** but is not the *same* everywhere - the point is to specify the variation and the **kinds and distributions of power**
- produced (exercised) from one moment to next at every point in every relationship
- not exterior to other forms of interaction
- exercised from below as well as above
- no absolute binary opposition of power and powerlessness (Simmel), power as **intercursive** (Wrong)
- exercise of power forms cleavages that run throughout society
- power *is* **intentional** – somewhere in the scheme (though sometimes far away) there is human intention and we have to trace it from the bottom all the way to the center – it is intelligible and knowable even if no longer of/ in an individual mind;
- power is also institutionalized so that intentions have been buried deep in the past, far from the surface, accumulated and layered
- for Foucault, like Simmel, wherever there is power there is the possibility of **resistance**
- we should not look for stable unchanging power structures, but notice the shifting modifications and shifts in distributions and appropriations
- re-invented and re-played over and over again – our task is to see how this happens

Thus far in this course, we've talked about concepts of power, relationships of power, and the theories to explain power distributions...

Our preliminary definition (Dennis Wrong) is that power is to produce intended and foreseen effects. This definition now needs to be elaborated: We have learned that power is not located solely in interpersonal relations but that these relations draw from larger environmental and organizational structures. *Power is exercised by individuals with resources that are institutionalized (sedimented) in groups, communities, and organizations.* We must look at these structures/institutionalization of power (what Foucault said when he said the ways of human control had shifted from body to mind to space).

- ◆ definition #1 [**micro**]: intended, foreseen effects on others (person to person)

- ◆ definition #2 [**macro**]: how institutions structure those micro interactions, how possibilities of exercising power are constrained or enabled by something larger (beyond,

more extensive) than discrete individual transactions

Social scientists talk about two these different micro/macro levels but they also talk about agency and structure:

◆ **agency:** "man makes history," human beings are agents, are active, have will and choice

◆ **structure:** "history makes man," examines constraints on individual action that come from organization and history, from patterns

All of social science is a debate between these two points of view. Social theory is an argument concerning **the** cause of what we see and experience. Is the cause located in us? In my personality, will, personal resources? How have my choices made this life? Or is there something larger than the individual that constrains individual behavior so that the agency that exists is limited, operating within channels shaped by structure?

The most popular contemporary theories attempt to describe a **feedback loop** in which individuals create the world around them but within limits. Some call this structuration (A. Giddens); others talk about the habitus (P. Bourdieu). For example, we took a vote for exam options. We broke the model, but will this become a model for others? What constraints do we have to organize the work in this class?

This is a **dialectical process**, oppositions work *together* and *in tension* with each other.

The actions of individuals and the meanings they attribute to their world become institutionalized slowly and then turned into social structures which then become part of the constraints that limit what individuals can do.

Example: one pattern we live with in classrooms was not in existence 100 years ago: the syllabus. How did these syllabi and sets of rules get to be so detailed? It started in a big way after WWII, and escalated in the last quarter of 20th century. This is something people made up and *now is a constraint*. The syllabus creates predictability for the students, allows planning, preparation, exposes the professors' planning or lack there of. What would it be like to be without a syllabus? How do we feel about that? What is so terrible about having unpredictability? Lots of rules (e.g. about hours of classes, timing of assignments, about grading, add/ drop periods, petitions for grade changes), the professor is not allowed to (and cannot individually) change the rules. As society gets more complex, as we occupy more **roles** and we need to coordinate them. The **heterogeneity /complexity necessitate coordination.** Thus, we **specify rules** more – we need **predictability** in order to mesh what might be conflicting roles and expectations. We cannot assume to share interests, perspectives, interpretations; informal action leads to conflict, conflict produces mechanisms for preventing and resolving, i.e. the rules.
  – Example within an example: Professor Silbey is equally a professor, a mother, a sister, a daughter. She has exams to grade but also Thanksgiving dinner to attend – the rules help to structure and coordinate these conflicting roles.
  – This is the macro, the historic, institutionalized, professional constraint on the personal transaction! This structure makes a **pattern of relationships** that is embedded in a larger one – work/family, earning a living, and emotional relationships. How much free choice do we have?

When we talk about structure and agency, we are talking about the balance of where the energy lies in shaping social relations.

structure = recurring pattern of social behavior, enduring relationships

Carolyn Heilbrun – (professor of literature at Columbia, recently deceased, also wrote detective stories as Amanda Cross)

– wrote a *Writing a Woman's Life* (1989) in which she explains **agency, privilege, and the limitations** (**structure)** within which they operate:

  – An academic dean trying to inspire students quotes from Heilbrun by saying:
    "It occurs to me now that many of us who are privileged should make use of our security to make noise, to be courageous, to become unpopular."

    The Dean had edited Heilbrun's text. How it *actually* read in her book:
    "It occurs to me now that as we age many of us who are privileged, those with assured place and pattern in their lives with some financial security are in danger of choosing to stay right where we are, to undertake each day's routine, and to listen to our arteries hardening. Instead, we should make use of our security, our seniority, to take risks, to make noise, to be courageous, to become unpopular."

– The first version is an invocation to students as *individuals* as if the capacity to be courageous lay in each alone. The original, longer version says that privilege derives from resources, you need to have *resources* to make noise, be courageous, be willing to become unpopular. The **resources** she names include seniority/age, secured place/role in society, finances. The first statement buries structure, suggests that the world is shaped by individuals, the second statement illustrates the idea that what persons can do depends on their access to institutionalized (socially valued) resources.

– **Opportunity** is *not* an individual production, a product of individual will, but a consequence of a pattern of social behavior, specifically in this example, deference to age, to people of certain social positions. Opportunity is created by an abundance of resources and can afford to take the risks because their positions (life chances) are not insecure, they have surplus of what they need; others who are not so advantaged cannot take the same risks with the same security if they fail.

Example: Professor Silbey's story about trying to raise revolutionary children: It requires a certain **level of comfort** not to worry of what's going to happen next. But if you come from a precarious position, you don't take as many risks. **Security fosters the ability to take risks.** You have to have the resources not to be worried. (P. Bourdieu's analysis in his book <u>Distinction</u>).

From now on, we are going to explore this intersection of individual will and structure.

<u>X/O cartoon movie by Rosabeth Kanter</u>
X = majority, O = minority

position the O usually finds him/herself in:
• demonstrate expertise equal to that of the Xs
• demonstrate the ability to be a "good" O
• spokesman for all O's

- token O

how to cope with **performance pressure**:
- overachievement – do more and better than most X's
- blend into Xs, but Xs may not accept this
- hide behind an X and thus avoid competition altogether (which leads to popular conclusion that the O fears success but what is *truly* feared is **excessive visibility**)

When there are all or few Xs, differences among the Xs are noticeable. But when you introduce an O into the group, differences among the X's are overwhelmed by this new and distinct O, and this makes the Xs a uniform **category by contrast**. There are questions such as "*will things ever be like they were before?"* Contrast serves as a reminder that all are still Xs and have not lost their X-ness. There can even be an exaggerated display of X culture when the O is around.

O must navigate in the X-network to get ahead, O has little or no support network of his/her own. How does O get into the X group? O gets defined as an exceptional O. O is expected to adopt X's point of view, even disparage other Os – gets assimilated into X culture.

O may feel torn between O's and X's. Other O's remind O that he/she is still an O. But success often depends on getting along with the X's, not the other O's.

Siding with X's leads to conclusions such as O's are prejudiced against other O's (**lack of solidarity**). But as long as there are so few of them, as long as X's set the standard, O's have to prove they are like X's and are forced to **compete** with other O's.

Statistical discrimination – assume that unusual O must be doing what all other O's do.

Stereotypes reinforced by organizations, boxing O in a certain role, confirms ideas of X's about O's. O may collude with X's in stereotypes because makes everyone more comfortable, no one has to change behavior.

roles of Os:
- helper
- sex object
- mascot
- militant

Labels not only set O apart, but point out ways for the O to get along with Xs comfortably – but none of these labels or characteristics have nothing to do with business! This takes away from Os competence and maps onto other characteristics. In the first three roles [from above], Xs protect Os and the idea that Os can't do more than the stereotyped behavior emerges. Militant O threatened by overexposure – harder tests and more chances to fail.

Problem of "good" O vs. "bad" O when more than one O in a group of Xs. Misconception that a group of X's has solved the problem of O-ness when one O can be "partnered" with another O. The Xs group the Os together regardless of individual O qualities.

Professor Silbey's commentary

The lesson is that **position shapes the person**. O is forced to play a part because of nature of situation he/she is in. His/her choices are limited and he/she is forced to act in predictable ways. X's are as much caught by the situation as the O's.   This is about **categories** of people and the **patterns** in which people live and which have developed as a consequence.

Decisions and choices of individuals are in part shaped by the roles they embody.

In *Distinction*, **Bourdieu** wrote about how **differentiation and inequality** is created in French society. He came to this by watching himself and other college students – those who came from middle class and upper middle class would spend their time doing multiple things (building social networks). The bottom half were busy studying – they were so geared at getting everything right that they ended up being less creative and would have less opportunities in the long run because they could not **take risk**. *How do you view the situation you are in?* The **privilege** attached to being on the top that allows you to take more risk in a certain situation.