

Dominance Structures: Obtained and Sustained
Through Power and Influence Strategies

Social control is often applied through specific behavior clusters that are important and relevant to the situation, the social structure, and the expression of power. In nearly all aspects of daily life, the situational impact of holding power over others is too strong to go unnoticed. Influence strategies differ for men and women. Whereas men typically employ approaches that involve coercion based on individual resources and competent legitimate, expert, and direct informational influence, women tend to use personal reward and sexuality strategies, both of which are less aggressive and direct than those of their male counterparts. Influence strategies may involve manipulation, supplication, bullying, autocracy, disengagement, and bargaining between one or more members of an interaction (Lips, 1991). Different reactions by targeted individuals are produced from the various styles of influence and the multiple ways of using power, depending on the interaction situation.

The purpose of this mixed-sex interaction was verbal and nonverbal exchanges of behavior within a group of socially interconnected individuals. The members present were socially connected to one another through work and mutual friends. This friendly gathering was exercised in a form of the commonly known 'house party'. This kind of social activity provides an opportunity for friends and co-workers to be involved with one another outside of the usual formal environments. This social gathering occurred at a residential home here in the city of Lubbock. Approximately thirty individuals were present and interacting. The group of focus consisted of seven individuals, including myself. The participants (five male and two female) of this group interaction were under the influence of alcohol. There were several relevant status relationships among the participants of the social group interaction. These included level associations based on sex, race, and occupational positions. The sex ratio of five to two clearly shows that this encounter was a male dominated interface. One racial class clearly dominated the other. Of the seven individuals two were Hispanic, and the remaining five were Caucasian. Four of the seven

participants are currently employed by the same local financial institution. There was a hierarchal association between these four people, since two of them occupy managerial positions and the others fill entry level positions.

The group (Jack*, Jeremy*, Sean*, Mike*, Nick*, Sarah*, and myself) stood out on the front porch and carried on multiple informal conversations while smoking cigarettes and drinking beers and mixed drinks. Upon assembly, we opened our discussion with topics that were strictly work-related and significant to only a few members. Jack and Sean conversed back and forth, speaking of recent changes that were made specific to their job duties. Jack began, “The policy changes that were made are nothing but good for us man; it’s about time they realize managers don’t need to work on Saturdays.” Sean replied, “I know – I’ve worked four Saturdays in a row. I thought getting moved up would take care of the ‘working on the weekend’ [stuff]. I better not have to work another weekend for a long time, or I’ll be really [mad].” Mike and Sarah, who are employed by the same institution as Jack and Sean, listened attentively to the discussion and volunteered factual information and comments at their own will. “Whatever, Sean. I have had to work every single weekend for the past six months. I never get Saturday’s off,” Mike said. Sarah, as she avoided all eye contact, agreed by nodding her head. Upon the interjection, Jack and Sean made sarcastic remarks that were both degrading and oppressive to their targets. Jack threw his arms up in the air and said “Ok, since you’re the boss now and all. You know what, you’re fired.” Jack and Sean looked at each other and laughed. Sean followed with “When you get bumped up to supervisor, we’ll ask you for your opinion.” Again, Jack and Sean snickered. At this point, Jack and Sean started toward the door. Jack turned and looked at me and asked, “You want me to make you a drink?” I hesitated and said, “Uh, yeah, but don’t make to too strong. I’m serious; I need to go home and study for a while before I go to bed.” He just stared at me, shrugged his shoulders, turned (while shaking his head) and walked into the house.

Upon returning from inside, Jack handed me my mixed drink. Sean noticed Nick sitting quietly in a chair. He looked at Nick and said, "What's up *vato*?" Nick replied, "Nothin' man. Just chillin'" and smiled. Jack's attention had turned to Jeremy and Sarah. "And ya'll, I'm surprised you two stuck up [people] decided to come out and be sociable. Ya'll are usually 'too good' to come out with us." "Well, we thought we'd make an exception tonight" Sarah said. Jack and Sean looked at each other and shook their heads. Jeremy, Nick, and I later talked about our upcoming midterms. I said "Man, I have got so much to do this week. I have a paper due for my family theory class and a stats midterm on Thursday." Nick replied, "I know. This week's gonna be hell." Jeremy looked at me and said, "Hey, if you help me write my English paper, I'll help you with your stats. Come on, I know you want to write my paper, Jen. It'll be good for you." He looked at Nick and they laughed. As the interaction proceeded through the course of the evening, Mike made several advances on me through sexual innuendos and physical contact. "What are you gonna do after this?" he asked. I said, "I'm gonna go home and hit the books." He waited a moment, smiled, and said, "You want some company?" I just looked at him and rolled my eyes. He went further in saying, "I can help you with your homework." I said, "Shut up, Mike." He stepped closer to me and put his arm around my shoulders, pulling me close to him. I withdrew in order to regain my personal space and walked away.

During this group interaction, there were several instances where Jack clearly exerted the most influence when interacting with others; thus, he is characterized as the dominant party. He was able to influence the flow of behavioral and verbal exchange through influential conduct. Oftentimes, "dominance is measured by the number of contributions to a joint [discussion] made by each individual in a pair... the number of times one person interrupts the other... and speaking intensity" (Lips, 95). Throughout the interaction, Jack lead conversation and offered more information and implications through snide comments and facial expressions than any other

individual present. If at any point he was not the center of attention, he assertively regained power by interrupting others and giving his opinion when it had not been solicited. Also, his voice increased in intensity as he aggressively talked over other members of the group. The more the discussion tones rose, the louder he became. Another form of dominance was evident through the maintenance of hierarchy stability. As Lips (1991) suggested, the need for conflict is reduced as long as the hierarchy is stable. In this particular situation, Mike and Sarah verbally challenged the stable power arrangement between themselves and Jack and Sean. By comparing the weekend schedules of workers in managerial positions to those in entry level positions, Mike disrupted the smooth interaction between the high and low status ranks, which led to an unpleasant conflict. However, the understood dominance structure prevailed in the face of opposing opinions because of the parties' perceptions of their individual status and position. Yet another dominance structure was evident based on the automatic initial rank differences associated with sex. Most obviously, Jack occupies an occupational position in higher standing than Sarah, which exemplifies the oppressive status differences that are all too common between men and women in the workforce. Power was also evident through the use of facial expressions and nonverbal behaviors, such as when Sarah nodded her head in agreement with opposing arguments while refraining from making eye contact with Jack and Sean. Averting the gaze is a strong gesture of submission, supporting the fact that women are more likely to drop their eyes than men. In the instance when Mike forcefully pulled me to him and held me there, dominance was conveyed through the initiation of nonreciprocal touch.

Power and influence strategies were constantly utilized in this interaction. Reward power is described by Lips (1991) as an assumed ability of one individual to reward another. It is important to note that the rewards controlled by one person *must* be important to the other person. It is not the capability to provide rewards, but the *perception* of that capability that is the source of power of influence. When Mike offered assistance with stats, he was offering a reward in exchange for me

writing his English paper. This attempt to employ reward power was not successful, because the reward was not important to me. I did not need assistance in preparing for my statistics exam; therefore his “help” was useless to me. Expert power and informational power were also exploited in the group interaction. Jack used these power influences in unveiling his knowledge of work related issues and topics in trying to persuade his co-workers to coincide with his line of reasoning. His knowledge of policy addendums and their implications provided factual bases for his arguments. Sean, even though considered ‘equal in position’, was submissive to this influence as he demonstrated no expertise in the realm of finance, therefore subjecting himself to power related manipulation. Jack’s employment of these power strategies was successful in rendering the support he so highly valued. The ineffective influence strategy that Mike tried to exercise on me can be viewed in light of a single dimension of power use. Mike aimed to try and compel me to submit to him sexually. This exertion of influence was based on Mike’s personal resource of offered affection. However, in order for the personal resource of affection to be influential, the target must care about and want to receive that affection. I did not have any desire to be the recipient of his affection; therefore, he had little basis of power for influencing me. Gender power relations were reflected through patterns of conversational control. The males present in the group talked much more than Sarah and I, and they interrupted us frequently when we did try to participate.

After analyzing the process that occurred in this interaction, I realized that in group interactions, we may act in a way that causes others to label us as powerful. Furthermore, how we think about ourselves and our individual actions often leaves more of an impression on our experience than does the actual situation. Another surprising realization that I have acknowledged is that no matter how generally effective power based influences are, there is usually a way to undermine the dominant figure, thus diminishing the credibility of the influencer for future power use. This group interaction revealed to me some of the ways in which a person concerned with

power can be expected to gain that power. This includes doing things that arouse strong positive or negative emotions in others, showing concern for reputation and respect in regards to status positions, and showing power by trying to impress another person.

Switching focus to the one-to-one exchange between Jack and me, the dyadic interaction served different purposes for each of us. For Jack, *I feel* (though I will never know for sure) that it was to take advantage of me. For me, it was a way of seeking help. This interaction occurred under the same situational circumstances as the group interaction, only a half an hour later. The status relationship between Jack and I was relevant to education and knowledge. I am a graduate student; he is an undergraduate student. I am an intelligent and learned person, in and outside of academia, and he *knows* that. To commence, I had begun to notice the side effects of my tampered beverage. I started to recognize the tingling sensation in my legs and fingers, suspecting that something was not right. I retreated into the hallway, and leaned back against the wall where I noticed that my vision was tunneled – peripheral vision lost. I started sweating and right then I knew I had been drugged. Jack suddenly came through the front door and into the hallway where I was. I just looked at him, shaking my head, and said, “Jack, something’s definitely not right here. I think somebody put something in my drink.” He (looking dumbfounded) said, “What? Oh come on Jennifer.” I insisted, explaining the physical reactions my body was having to the drink, and reassuring him that it wasn’t the alcohol. “Jack, you know me and you know I’ve drank a hell of a lot more than this in my day. I am telling you – something is not right about this.” He just laughed at my seriousness and replied “Oh babe, I think you’re just getting a little drunk.”

I looked at the floor, trying to collect my thoughts. Fatigue was beginning to set in, and I remember it being so hard to remain standing. He just stared at me. “You know, you look so great tonight, Jen. You *really* do. I haven’t seen you look this good in a long time. I want you to let me take you to dinner. Just me and you. I want to show you how you deserve to be treated.” I just

remained looking at the floor, trying to figure out *why* he was coming on to me when he knew that something was happening to me. I remember thinking at that point “Oh my God, it was him. Why is he doing this to me?” Then, without saying another word, he moved toward me and bent down, trying to kiss me on the mouth. I pushed him away and said “Damn it Jack, I said something is wrong with me. I feel it – it’s not right.” At this point, he turned and stormed out the front door. I remember thinking “I don’t have a choice but to let him drive me home. I can have Rachel* meet me at the house, so that I don’t have to be alone with him.” So I called after him, knowing that if he left the party, I would not have a ride, and I would pass out alone and vulnerable. “Jack! Get back here!” I said. He turned around, making clear his frustration in response to my rejecting his advances. I just looked down and said, “Please, will you just take me home. I want to get out of here – now.” He agreed and we walked to his truck. He had to physically support me; I had no sensation left in my entire body, and I was very dizzy. On the way home, I managed to dial Rachel’s number. Upon seeing me, Jack said “What are you doing? Who are you calling? You probably shouldn’t wake anyone up, Jen. It’s getting late.” I just kept silent; at this point I was very afraid, and hoping with all of my heart that Rachel would answer. She did, and I just muttered “Come to my house.” I hung up the phone. When we arrived at my house, Jack exited the truck and came around to the passenger side. I was still buckled into the seat. He opened the door, reached around to unbuckle me and said, “Babe, I don’t think she is coming. Why don’t you just let me get you inside the house? I’ll get you comfortable and put you in bed.” Thoughts raced through my mind – negative thoughts, fearful thoughts. I told him no, that I wanted to wait outside for Rachel to arrive. He continued to use persuasive tactics to get me into the house. “I guarantee you’ll feel a lot better when I get you into bed” he said. About that time, Rachel’s car appeared and pulled into the driveway. Scared to death, and relieved to see her, I just fell out of the truck onto the

ground, trying desperately to just get away from Jack. At this point, I had ample evidence to regard him as my number one suspect.

The interaction between Jack and I that evening was shaped by dominance structures enveloping predominately the dominion of sex. These gender related dominance structures strive to discourage females from maintaining independence and subdue their efforts of personal control. In our interaction, Jack's dominating qualities were revealed through the number of challenges to my opinions and concerns regarding my physical state. He firmly reassured the fact that I had not been drugged, and that I was misinterpreting the situation, since what I *was* feeling were really just effects of the alcohol. His dictating tactics were also evident in other behavioral indications in which he was exerting strong influence on me, particularly in his forceful and unwanted sexual advances. A dominance hierarchy based on physical size and strength was also relevant. Jack rests easily at six foot two inches tall (I am four foot eleven inches tall) and outweighs me by a solid ninety pounds. As I was the individual lower in this hierarchy, he expected me to defer to him, the more dominant individual.

The power strategies that were employed in our interaction entailed interpersonal, exchange, forceful and deliberate influence attempts, none of which were successful. Jack involved and exercised a lopsided interpersonal influence characterized as "one person getting an unwilling other to behave in a particular way" (Lips, 56). Repeatedly in the past years, he has made evident his emotional and lustful admiration for me by continuously asking me over for dinner, drowning me with transparent flattery, and by blatantly revealing his sexual desires for me. I have rejected his advances time and time again, each time leaving him more frustrated and discouraged. I rationalize this lopsided interpersonal influence as such: by putting a 'date-rape' drug into my drink, he is forcefully getting me, the unwilling other, to behave in a particular way *by not behaving* at all. Theoretically, the potency of the drug would have ejected me from consciousness (as it did later that

night), thus removing the restraints and declinations to his advances that I would normally implement during a conscious, aware state. This was his failed attempt at using power against me – to get me to do what he wanted, despite resistance. An equally evident power difference is seen in light of relationship exchange. Lips (1991) suggests that the person who holds the greatest power is the one who needs the least out of social exchanges and relationships. That is, the individual who *needs* the exchanges or relationship least has the most power. Jack knew (through years of trying) that I had no interest in being involved with him, neither in a relationship nor sexually. Thus, I have always held more power than he; I have always been out of reach and unmovable in my associations with him.

I also feel that the power influences he employed here can be compared to the notion of ‘winning at any cost.’ Jack was not exerting control merely to achieve a particular goal; control over me *was* his ultimate goal. In response to my noncompliance, Jack utilized a coercive power strategy essentially trying to ‘punish’ me for my rebelliousness against his come-ons. However, the coercion did not work – the desired behavioral response (or unconscious lack thereof) did not occur. He wanted to take advantage of me, and the anger and frustration I experienced as a result of his coercive tactics drove me to resist even more. I repeatedly told myself not to give him what he wanted; I fought off the effects of the drug, and put all of my effort in sustaining a conscious awareness. Jack’s influence strategies were indirect and purposely used to disguise his attempt to use power against me. The indirect influencer is devious and tries to influence without their intentions being noticed (Lips, 1991). Jack convinced himself that he was sly enough to forcefully remove any barriers that may bolster my rejection of him. He also employed a helplessness dimension of influence strategy by donning weakness. This weakness-based influence style was evident when he stormed out the door after my resistance to his kiss. By feeling ‘sorry’ for himself and exiting the room, he exacted guilt from me by implying that I had hurt him once again, and

inadvertently sought compliance after I rejected his intentions. Lastly, I feel that Jack tried to impose power over me through a more latent power structure involving 'learned helplessness.' In this situation, his use of a drug to influence me had the underlying purpose to make me feel that I had no control over what was happening to me, so that eventually I would stop trying to reject his manipulative authority. This strategy, like the others, was not successful; despite his intentions, I logically and rationally examined my circumstantial options, devised a plan, and forced the 'helplessness' aside to overcome his power.

Despite the overall negativity of this interaction with Jack, I discovered several important effects of influence strategies that I feel will benefit me in the future. Live it, learn it, and share it. The complete failure of Jack's intentional power use has left him feeling very insecure, since his personal resources and influential tactics were not effective in controlling me. I have also realized that I am now in the position to ultimately decrease his power; the extent to which he tried to enforce limitations on and manipulate me will be widely known in our social circle. Consequently, this will decrease his authority among our network. Furthermore, his behavior will cause resentment among other women, enough resentment that he will never again be welcome amongst the female components of our social system. The ultimate lesson learned is this: if you are strong enough endure an experience such as this one, you must force yourself to overcome it, to learn from it, and to teach yourself *and* the people around you to be nothing but aware of it. Power is nothing to be afraid of.

* Denotes name substitutions of members of the interactions

References

Lips, H. M. (1991). *Women, Men, and Power*. Mountain View, CA: Mayfield.

Appendix A

NOTE: *these field notes were actually typed the morning after these interactions took place. I have made appropriate name substitutions.*

Where: Sean's house (There were about 30 people at this party, most of which I have known for several years)

When I got there, the "group" drank and talked about mostly work and the bank; the usual.

Jack just shook his head at me disapprovingly for not telling Mike off in front of everyone; I didn't want to make a scene, so I just made a low key comment and walked off. Jack was jealous I could tell.

When Jack asked if I wanted a drink, I said 'yes'; I made it very clear that I did not want it to be very strong. I really emphasized this.

When he brought it back to me, I drank about ¼ of it. I asked him what was in it and he said that it was Vodka, Cranberry Juice, and Sprite.

When I began to realize that something was wrong with me, I consecutively lost feeling in all parts of my body – my legs went numb, then my arms and hands, then I had a hard time seeing and hearing, and I started sweating. I knew immediately – I told Joe that something was wrong – I told him that my body felt like it was systematically shutting down.

He kept saying things like "Baby I think you just drank a little too much – Maybe you can't handle it like you used to could." He was making every attempt to hit on me, telling me I looked hot and sexy, and that he wanted to take me to dinner and treat me as I deserved to be treated, and take care of me

I was leaning on a wall; the drug had really kicked in – remember thinking "it won't be long until I pass out"

He walked up and I tried to explain what was happening to me, and all he did was try to kiss me. He blocked me from going anywhere, but I shoved him away as hard as I could with my forearm. He got mad at me and stormed out of the house. I called after him because I knew that I needed to get out of there before I passed out (and there was no way that I would be able to drive myself).

Logical thinking: call Rachel, she'll take you to a hospital if you're really dying; she'll help you; your phone is in the front seat of your car; get it and call her now.

I remember that when we were in his truck he kept on trying to convince me that I had had too much to drink. I was trying to ignore what he was saying; I opened my phone and tried so hard to

find Rachel's number. I remember that when she answered the phone, I couldn't even really talk – my voice wouldn't work, and Jack kept trying to get my phone so that he could talk to her (I am sure to convince her it was alcohol too.)

He just kept saying "Who is that? Who are you calling? You don't need to call anyone."

He pulled up to my house and got out – I stayed inside the truck because I couldn't stand up – my legs wouldn't hold me.

He kept telling me that she was not coming and to just give him my key so that he could unlock the door and get me inside – I just ignored him and tried to focus my thoughts.

When Rachel got there, he immediately started telling her that I had had way too much to drink (actually $\frac{1}{4}$ of a cup) and not to worry, I was just drunk

More than anything, I remember how paranoid I was – I was afraid that everyone was out to get me – that everyone was trying to hurt me. I did not trust anyone but myself and Rachel.

This morning, Jack called and reaffirmed his position that I have been way to drunk the night before.