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ABSTRACT

Using Amitai Etzioni's (1961) sociological model as a basis for analysis, the paper examines the relationship between central student characters and their chief reference group or significant other(s) in the schools as portrayed in three films: "If" (1969), "Child's Play" (1972), and "Educating Rita" (1983). Two variables are employed: the kind of power used over the students and the students' involvement or orientation toward the people or system wielding this power. Following a theoretical background describing the various types of power and compliance structures presented in Etzioni's model, each film is analyzed separately. The paper also warns educators against taking compliance structures of the school or classroom for granted and suggests that educators (1) do not rely solely on coercive means to gain student compliance since conformity is purchased at the price of student alienation from the educator and all he/she represents, thereby preventing the internalization of the affective portions of the curriculum, (2) take heed of the student social system and its potential power over the behavior of its members, and (3) do not stray from the professional role of the educator who places student's welfare above his/her own. Teachers who confuse personal social goals with professional goals present students with conflicting expectations for performance, and may undermine the very objectives they are employed to attain. (LH)

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POWER AND INVOLVEMENT IN THREE FICTIONAL SCHOOLS
FROM THE SILVER SCREEN

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POWER AND INVOLVEMENT IN THREE FICTIONAL SCHOOLS FROM
THE SILVER SCREEN

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This paper is an analysis of three films using the same sociological model for each. The analysis is both inductive and deductive: inductive in the sense that the empirical observations were made before the selection of a theoretical model; and deductive in that these observations were used to test hypotheses generated by the model. The method employed is akin to that of the ethnographer. However, it differs from ethnography in three important ways: first the material for analysis was not raw material obtained from a natural setting as would be the case in traditional ethnography, but from an artificial social world created for a special purpose by the film makers and others; second, there was no access to additional material in order to assess hypotheses generated by the analysis; and third, the original material could be and was examined repeatedly since this artificial world remained unchanged. Thus, conclusions drawn from this unorthodox excursion into novel sources must be tempered by the knowledge that the primary material was not raw in that it had undergone prior interpretation and, of equal importance, crucial pieces of the puzzle may have been missing from the outset. Nevertheless, the process of doing a sociological analysis of films provides a challenging opportunity to apply and possibly test existing theoretical perspectives, and the outcomes of the analysis are sufficiently instructive for the conduct of education within school settings to conclude that films as data sources for the study of social systems warrant further investigation.

The analysis of films reported here focuses on the important sociological question--Why do some people allow others to tell them what to do? This issue is embedded in a perplexity with which generations of social theorists have struggled, namely--what is it which holds a society or social system together? The focus in this case is on the relationship between the central student characters and their chief reference group or significant other(s) in the schools as portrayed in the three films. Two variables are employed: the kind of power used over the students and the students' involvement or orientation toward the people or system wielding this power. Power and involvement were selected for several reasons: first, they are variables in the sense that they differ in kind among the three schools; second, a theoretical framework developed by Etzioni (1961) employing these variables is firmly established in sociological literature; and third, they are essential to understanding

the relationships between the relevant students and the source of power over them.

For "IF" (1969) a film set in an upper-class British boys boarding school, the analysis is of the relationship between the formal power of the school and the involvement of the small rebel group of boys. For "CHILD'S PLAY" (1972) set in an upper-middle class New England Catholic boys boarding school, it is of the relationship between the power of the student peer group and the involvement of individual students. For "EDUCATING RITA" (1983) set in a traditional British university where a student from the televised Open University meets with her university tutor, it is of the power of the tutor and Rita's involvement in that dyad or social system. By placing this analytical template over the relevant observations, insights were gained which may not have been intended or recognized by the films' creators.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Problematic in many social systems, and especially in schools where attendance is mandatory, is how do people get other people to do what they want them to do? According to Etzioni's theory, the mechanism for bringing about compliance is power. Stated simply, power is the capacity of one person to employ reinforcements, either positive or negative, which result in the other person's obedience.

Etzioni posits three types of power: coercive power -- the potential use of negative sanctions based on physical or psychological harm, either real or threatened; remunerative power -- the potential use of positive sanctions based on the ability to supply material rewards, either directly or indirectly; and normative power -- the potential use of positive or negative sanctions based on the manipulation of symbolic rewards and deprivations. Normative power is divided further into pure normative power, which involves the manipulation of esteem, prestige, and ritualistic symbols, and social power which is social acceptance or rejection by others who are significant.

Involvement is the orientation toward this power of the person who is expected to comply. Whereas power refers to the kinds of reinforcements available for obtaining compliance, involvement refers to the kind of affective orientation of the object of this power toward the individual or social system wielding it.

Involvement ranges in affect from positive to negative and in intensity from high to low. Extremely positive and extremely negative affect are posited to be of high intensity, and neutral affect of low intensity. Intense positive affect leads to commitment to the individual and/or

social system demanding compliance, whereas intense negative affect leads to alienation from it/them.

Etzioni describes three types of involvement:

alienative involvement-- an intense negative orientation toward the person or system with power;

calculative involvement-- a moderate positive or negative orientation of low intensity toward the person or social system; and

moral involvement -- an intense positive orientation toward the person or social system.

As with normative power, there are two kinds of moral involvement, pure and social. Pure moral involvement is rooted in the internalization or acceptance of the norms of the social system and/or identification with the power figure, whereas social involvement is based on sensitivity to peer pressure. Although high commitment is an element in both kinds of moral involvement, compliance in pure moral involvement is due to the belief that the requested action is a means to some shared goal; compliance in social moral involvement is due to the fact that people in the group are ends-in-themselves rather than a means to some future goal.

The compliance structure of a social system is the combination of the kind of power held by those who demand compliance (superordinates) and the kind of involvement of lower-level participants (subordinates). There are nine possible types of compliance structures. (See Figure 1.) However, the kind of power and the kind of involvement are congruent or compatible in only three of them. These compliance structures are typical in long-established social systems. According to Etzioni, social systems are stable only when the kinds of power and involvement are congruent; when they are not, there is a strain toward consistency so that the power, involvement, or both change over time toward greater compatibility. If a congruent compliance structure is never attained, the system itself may not be able to survive.

The three congruent compliance structures identified by Etzioni (Figure 1) are:

COERCIVE with coercive power and alienative involvement;

UTILITARIAN with remunerative power and calculative involvement; and

NORMATIVE with normative power and moral involvement.

PURE NORMATIVE with power over symbolic rewards and involvement based on the acceptance of the system's goals.

SOCIAL NORMATIVE with power to accept or reject the individual and sensitivity to peer acceptance or rejection.

Most social systems have a secondary compliance system as well as a primary system. They may support one another as, for example, when one system is Normative and the other Utilitarian, or may undermine one another as when one system is Normative and the other Coercive. The relative dominance of the compliance structure may fluctuate when conditions in the social system vary.

"IF"

The compliance structure most relevant to Travis and his rebel friends in the British upper-class boys boarding school portrayed in "IF" is COERCIVE (Type 1, Figure 1).

The formal power over them was potentially or actually coercive since they apparently had no choice but to attend the school and school authorities and designated upper-classmen had the capacity to use physical punishment to gain compliance. For example, the headmaster forced the rebels to clear the cellar as a punishment. (This was a fatal choice for the school for it was in the cellar that the boys found the cache of weapons they later used to destroy school buildings, those who exercised coercive power over them, some of those who granted that power including parents and the Bishop, and their fellow students.)

The headmaster also delegated coercive power to selected upper-classmen known as "whips" to "shape-up" the school. The whip Denson used his power in employing negative physical and psychological sanctions against the rebels. For example, he had them stand in cold showers for excessively long periods while he luxuriated in a warm tub within their view, drinking hot tea served by a lower-classman (a "scum"). Later Denson confiscated a string of teeth from Travis' neck which had symbolic value to Travis. Most important to the film's plot was Rowntree's excessive caning of Travis: this was the extreme physical and psychological coercive act that brought Travis' alienation to the point of armed rebellion.

The reciprocal of the formal coercive power over the rebels was their intense alienative involvement. Travis' alienation from the values of upper-class British society and the school which embodied them was apparent from the the film's

beginning. He arrived at school with a mustache he obviously enjoyed, his hair was excessively long by school standards, his study was filled with "outrageous" photos of Che Guevara, Mao, war scenes, nude women, and so on. His alienation grew commensurate with the use of coercive power until it reached the intensity of armed revolt-- whether real or imaginary.

To re-cap, the primary compliance structure relating to the rebel boys in "IF" was COERCIVE. It was made up of coercive power and alienative involvement, two compatible types which reinforced each other. The more alienated the rebels became, the more coercive actions were taken against them; and the more they were coerced, the more alienated their behavior.

The secondary compliance structure relating to the rebel boys was an incompatible type (Type 7a, Figure 1). The power employed over them by the school was pure normative, whereas they responded only with alienative involvement. This is not to say that the PURE NORMATIVE compliance structure (Type 9a, Figure 1) did not exist elsewhere in the school; it was clearly evident in the involvement of most other boys. The school depicted in "IF" employed normative power to bring about student socialization which was the power most consistent with its mission of socializing the boys to the "responsibilities of the British upper class."

To accomplish its socialization mission the school was structured into a hierarchy similar to the larger British society with increasing privilege and responsibility for persons at the top and deprivations for those at the bottom. The new boys ("scum") can be viewed upon entry as symbolizing the relatively unrewarded members of the British lower class in that they had no power or privilege upon arrival. However, they differed from the lower-class in that they had opportunity for mobility; as they internalized the culture of the upper class their condition in the school gradually improved. The students were surrounded with values of the establishment; they were reflected everywhere in: the school's authority structure; its formal curriculum; its rhetoric about the relationship between power and responsibility; patriotic, religious, and school rituals; and analogies relating school, family, and country. For those who made these values their own, their involvement in the school was pure moral -- the most effective kind of involvement for voluntary compliance.

However, the involvement response of Travis and his friends to the use of normative power by the school was further alienation. They could not have been morally involved-- the involvement type congruent with pure normative power-- since they did not value the culture that was being transmitted. Nor could their response have been social moral involvement;

peer approval had no meaning for them since they were not part of the peer social system that internalized school-sponsored values. Calculative involvement was also unlikely since the school lacked reinforcements to offer them; even certification of completion of secondary school would not have been a reward since they were alienated from the existing society as well the boarding school. Thus, they reacted to the school's use of normative power in the same way they reacted to its use of coercive power -- further alienation.

This secondary compliance structure (Type 7a, Figure 1) was precarious in that it contained the incompatible elements of normative power and alienative involvement. Etzioni's theory predicts a strain toward consistency in which either the kind of power or involvement or both will tend to change. Given the film's plot, it would seem that the school would be forced to recognize that pure normative power did not bring about the compliance of Travis and his rebels, and from then on would rely solely on coercive power. In fact, the end of the film suggests that there would be no other choice. For those boys the school would become a "total" institution with only one compliance structure, COERCIVE, in which the lower-level participants controlled by coercive means are totally alienated. What is suggested here is the compliance structure of a maximum security institution and like most penal institutions it would have few educational functions since it would be impotent in bringing about rehabilitation. With no normative power there can be no effective deliberate socialization.

Before leaving the analysis of "IF," it should be pointed out that the school might have attempted remunerative power over Travis and the others. This kind of power is often successful in the "behavior modification" of the most intractable students. If those in charge had been able to identify tangible rewards valued by the rebels, they may have been successful in eliciting calculative involvement from them. In that case, the rebels would have complied merely because of what was "in it" for them. This UTILITARIAN compliance structure (Type 5, Figure 1) in which remunerative power is paired with calculative involvement is thought to exist to some extent in all classrooms everywhere.

"CHILD'S PLAY"

The compliance structures in the New England Catholic boys boarding school presented in the film "CHILD'S PLAY" differs from that in "IF" because of its all-encompassing strong informal student-peer group and the fact that the group norms were incompatible with those of the school. Sociological research into American secondary schools have long documented that student social systems develop norms restricting their members' compliance with school

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expectations (Waller, 1933; Coleman, 1961). In boarding schools where students are denied routine nonschool contacts, the in-school peer group is exceedingly powerful.

The most significant compliance structure for the juniors in the film "CHILDS'PLAY" was SOCIAL NORMATIVE (Type 9b, Figure 1) in which the power of the peer group over the individual and the individual's involvement in the peer group are congruent. The peer group employs social normative power through its ability to accept or reject individual boys as part of its social system. The congruent reciprocal of social normative power is social moral involvement in which members of the group seek peer acceptance. The sensitivity of individuals to peer pressure was present within the junior class as illustrated in part by the refusal of most of them to respond correctly to the questions of the Latin teacher Jerome Malley (James Mason).

The film is unclear as to why the boys agreed among themselves not to perform, but one could assume these restrictive norms were developed because of their function of protecting group members from teacher expectations which exceed performance levels they can or want to meet. The film suggests the boys were encouraged to enforce these norms by the congenial English teacher Joe Dobbs (Robert Preston) who had his own agenda concerning the Latin teacher.

The secondary compliance structure affecting the junior class in "CHILD'S PLAY" was Type 3b (Figure 1)-- in which coercive power is paired incongruently with social moral involvement. The peer group was observed to exercise coercive power through physical punishment of boys who violated its restrictive norm pertaining to performance in the Latin class. The film shows individual boys correctly responding to Jerome Malley's questions and their later brutalization in the locker room, gym, and chapel. Curiously, the victims did not react to this abuse with alienative involvement, as would be expected in a congruent compliance structure, but with cooperation in their own physical punishment and with refusal to discuss it even when questioned by Dobbs whom they supposedly loved.

Individual students responded to coercive and social normative power in the same way -- with social moral commitment. Acceptance by the peer group was so important that alienation from it was unlikely. Because of the incompatible kinds of power and involvement, this secondary compliance structure (Type 3b, Figure 1) was unstable and should have been expected to move toward either COERCIVE (Type 1) or SOCIAL NORMATIVE (Type 9b). Evidence of the system straining toward the consistency of SOCIAL NORMATIVE by eliminating coercive power over its student members was provided in the closing scenes when the boys closed ranks and attacked outsiders Joe Dobbs and the young gym teacher

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Paul Reis (Beau Bridges). Dobbs was mobbed after Reis explained to the boys that Dobbs never loved them, but rather had exploited them, and, moreover, had accepted another position. Throughout the film Dobbs presented himself as if part of their primary group both in the content of his speech and his affective interactions. He appeared to want to be part of the group, although more as a leader than a rank and file member as indicated by his self-presentation of one who could be trusted. But he could not be trusted. In the end, the boys treated him coercively, the same way they treated group members who violated their norms. The attack on Reis was probably no more than the "shooting of the messenger."

"EDUCATING RITA"

Central to the story line in "Educating Rita" is the relationship between the kind of power attempted to be exercised by Frank (Michael Caine), the open university tutor, and the kind of involvement of Rita (Julie Walters), his working-class student. At the film's beginning, the compliance structure was solely UTILITARIAN. Frank, who did not want to tutor Rita, was assigned the task of preparing her for her external examination. Rita was involved in the university because in her words, "I want to discover meself" and her belief that the university was a way to do this. However, she had no realistic information about the institution or appreciation of the content of its curriculum. Her quest, in spite of the fact that she apparently was fond of her husband whom she later exchanged for a university degree, may have been imbedded in values transmitted to her by her mother who is shown at the neighborhood pub with the family saying through her tears, "There must be better songs to sing."

As Rita began to acquire knowledge she discovered intrinsic value in the curriculum and internalized the symbolic value of the university. While her involvement was primarily calculative throughout the film, it was supported by pure moral secondary involvement. Her two kinds of involvement were apparent in her statement to Frank: "I was hungry for it all, I didn't question any of it, I was filled with empty phrases." Her appreciation of curriculum content first appeared after she saw "McBeth" and burst into Frank's formal class to tell him it was "so wonderful!" Pure moral involvement assisted her general socialization as well as her acquisition of knowledge. This was seen when she returned from residency at another college by the facts that she had given up smoking, toned down her hair color, and affected other behavioral characteristics she associated with people above her "station."

As Frank began to discover Rita, his use of remunerative power gave way to social normative power, which was not compatible with Rita's pure moral and calculative involvement. He wanted Rita to be interested in him as a person, but to Rita he primarily was a means to passing her external university examination. Frank's desire for social normative power over Rita was illustrated after he learned of her husband's objection to her enrollment when he asked somewhat hopefully if her husband thinks they are having an affair. "Oh no," responded Rita showing her calculative involvement with Frank, "You're me teacher." On at least one occasion Frank indicated that it was more important for Rita not to change herself than to pass the examination showing that pure normative power was absent in his relationship with Rita. Again Rita disagreed. When she finally demonstrated her command of literature and her social comfort with members of the upper-middle class, rather than expressing pleasure with her progress which would have been an indication of pure normative power, Frank told her, "You have a new song to sing, Rita, but not a better one."

Frank's use of social normative power was incompatible with Rita's calculative and pure moral involvement. As long as she thought that Frank was an instrument to help her pass the examination she was committed to him, but once he revealed that he did not embody the norms of the social class she wished to enter (as she saw them) and was a poor teacher because of his drinking, her commitment diminished. For example, she refused to permit him to tutor her after she saw him intoxicated while in class, nor did she respond to his unsubtle requests for verbal demonstration of affection. Instead, she tried to reward him after she completed her examination as if he had exercised pure normative power by coming to his office to tell him he had been a good teacher.

The secondary compliance structure (Type 9c, Figure 1) in "Educating Rita" was not incompatible with the primary UTILITARIAN one; it could have and probably did reinforce it somewhat. However, it was incompatible within itself, although it did not necessarily have to be. Incompatibility in this instance was due to the fact that Frank, although a tutor at the university, did not embody the university norms having lost interest in the role of professor of literature. Not so with Rita who had at least internalized the symbolic meaning of the university. She had an inconsistent orientation toward Frank in that she accepted him for his instrumental value in preparing her for her examination while rejecting him for his rejection of the university. Their relationship was doomed once Rita passed her examination for Frank, who no longer held any reinforcements for her, had lost his power; she had reached her calculative objective. The film ends as Rita and Frank

express their gratitude to one another and move in different directions.

CONCLUSIONS

The analysis demonstrates three important elements in Etzioni's model.

First, congruent compliance structures are less likely than incongruent structures to change in either the power used by superordinates or the kind of involvement toward that power of subordinates. In both "Child's Play" and "Educating Rita" there were congruent primary compliance structures. In "Child's Play" the peer group exercised social normative power over its members who complied because of their social normative involvement. Due to this congruence, the peer group was able to prevail in the film (for worse rather than better) in spite of strong impediments within the school. The intense positive commitment of the boys to the peer group enabled them to destroy the school while keeping the group intact. In "Rita" the primary compliance structure was UTILITARIAN and remained in tact until the objectives of the remunerative power used by Frank and the calculative involvement of Rita had been reached.

The second point is that multiple compliance structures are not necessarily more effective than a single dominant structure. This was seen in "If" where the power orientation was an incompatible combination of coercive (which breeds alienative) and pure normative (which requires moral involvement). Since the rebel students' involvement was totally alienative the attempted use of normative power could never be effective. If official power had been limited to coercive, the rebels might have been constrained physically from destroying the school.

The third major point demonstrated by this analysis of films is that the kind of involvement of students determines the extent to which school objectives can be attained. Normative involvement is required for socialization objectives, whereas cognitive objectives may be attained with either moral or calculative involvement, and the attainment of any educational objectives (other than physical compliance) is unlikely with alienative involvement. In "Child's Play" the peer group was able to get its members to behave in ways contradictory to the values of the school and the larger society that were embedded in the school's socialization objectives because of their intense moral involvement with the group. "Rita" was able to acquire sufficient knowledge to pass her examination because of her calculative involvement with Frank and the university. On the other hand, her later moral involvement, demonstrated by her developing appreciation of literature, paired incongruously with Frank's attempts to gain social normative power over

her may have restricted her socialization to the values of literature and the upper-middle class. A more extreme example of this point was that Travis and his fellow rebels were untouched by the deliberate socialization content of the school, as their alienative activity attests; although they must have met some of the school's cognitive objectives or they would not have been allowed to remain.

For educators, the most important caveat extracted from this analysis is not to take compliance structures of the school or classroom for granted. Their effects can range from total educational success to total destruction of the school. Rather, educators should learn to analyze compliance structures critically and to manipulate them to the extent possible so that the education and socialization of students are maximized and the system survives on the educators' terms.

More specifically, the analysis of these films suggests the following:

One, do not rely solely on coercive means to gain student compliance since conformity is purchased at the price of student alienation from the educator and all s/he represents, thereby preventing the internalization of the affective portions of the curriculum.

Two, take heed of the student social system and its potential power over the behavior of its members. If its culture disregards or disdains school objectives, individual members probably will do likewise.

And third, do not stray from the professional role of educator who places student's welfare above his/her own. Teachers who confuse personal social goals with professional goals present students with conflicting expectations for performance, and may undermine the very objectives they are employed to attain.

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Figure 1. The Compliance Structures of Three Fictional Schools

Kinds of Power	Kinds of Involvement			
	Alienative	Calculative	Moral Pure	Social
Coercive	1 COERCIVE	2	3a	3b
Remunerative	4	5 UTILITARIAN	6a	6b
Normative Pure	7a	8a	9a PURE NORMATIVE	9b
Social	7b	8b	9c SOCIAL NORMATIVE	

Notes: Compliance structures of schools portrayed in the films are as follows -- "If" Type 1, dominant, Type 7a, secondary; "Child's Play" Type 9b dominant, Type 3b secondary; "Educating Rita" Type 5 dominant, 9c secondary.

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