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Keywords

bargaining, power, tactical action, hostile tactics, conciliatory tactics

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Power Processes in Bargaining

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Abstract

This is a theoretical article that integrates and extends a particular program of work on power in bargaining relationships. Power is conceptualized as a structurally based capability, and power use as tactical action falling within either conciliatory or hostile categories. The core propositions are (1) the greater the total amount of power in a relationship, the greater the use of conciliatory tactics and the lower the use of hostile tactics; and (2) an unequal power relationship fosters more use of hostile tactics and less use of conciliatory tactics than an equal power relationship. Distinct research on power dependence and bilateral deterrence provides support for both propositions. Implications are discussed for power struggle in ongoing relationships.

INTRODUCTION

This article articulates an abstract theoretical position on the role of power in bargaining based on an overview and integration of a particular program of theory and research (e.g., Bacharach and Lawler 1981a; Lawler and Bacharach 1986, 1987; Lawler 1986; Lawler, Ford, and Blegen 1988; Lawler and Yoon 1990). It explicates the fundamental assumptions, extracts the central theoretical propositions, summarizes recent evidence, and suggests implications for power struggle over time. The study assumes a two-party, intergroup bargaining setting, such as between a union and management or between two nations, but its focus is on general theoretical principles for addressing the impact of power. The basic issue is: How does power in relationships affect parties' use of conciliatory and hostile tactics in bargaining?

The program of work attends to several theoretical gaps in extant bargaining literature. First, work on bargaining tends to neglect the social structure that envelopes parties. Second, given this neglect, analyses of power in bargaining tend to be undeveloped and implicit (Bacharach and Lawler 1981a). Third, while tactics of influence receive substantial attention, especially in the social psychological literature (Rubin and Brown 1975; Pruitt 1981; Neale and Bazerman 1991), the connection between tactics and structural power positions receives scant attention. In fact, few works clearly conceptualize tactics as involving the use of power (see Michener and Suchner 1972 for an exception). Fourth, given that much, if not most, intergroup bargaining (e.g., between labor and management) occurs within ongoing power relationships, there is a need for theory to analyze how power affects tactic choices in immediate bargaining settings and how such tactics might inadvertently change the power relationship underlying future bargaining. Implicit and explicit ideas in Richard Emerson's theory of power dependence

(Emerson 1962, 1972; Bacharach and Lawler 1981a) are developed here to fill these gaps in the existing bargaining literature.

Two Program Assumptions

Given the relative paucity of work on bargaining by sociologists (see Strauss 1978; Bacharach and Lawler 1981a; Schellenberg 1982; Heckathorn 1985; Patchen 1987 for some exceptions), we emphasize that bargaining is an integral component of important social processes. For example, it often forges a link between social structure and social action, macro and micro levels, and so forth (see also Strauss 1978). Explicating two broad assumptions underlying our program makes this evident and also sets the stage for our subsequent analysis of power.

Structural Embeddedness

First, we adopt the common sociological premise that social conflict—whether between individuals, groups, organizations, or societies—has a social structural foundation (Simmel 1950; Dahrendorf 1959; Cook and Emerson 1978; Wright 1985). The primary units of structure are “positions,” abstractly representing the places that people or groups can come to occupy (e.g., Wright 1985). These positions entail interests that occupants represent in interaction with others, and the interests are passed on to successive occupants. From a structuralist standpoint, the primary cleavages in a social structure are based on the interests of the positions occupied by parties, rather than characteristics of the parties per se.

A structuralist approach to conflict differs in subtle, yet important, ways from an interpersonal approach. An interpersonal approach implicitly characterizes most bargaining literature, as exemplified by Dean Pruitt's (1981) detailed work. He conceptualizes negotiation as "a process by which a joint decision is made by two or more parties [with opposing interests]" (p. 1); furthermore, "interests should never be regarded as inherently opposed" (p. 4). To say parties have opposing interests is to say their different individual needs or opinions lead them to incompatible preferences (p. 1). Thus, interests are primarily properties of individuals, not structural positions.

From interpersonal premises, bargaining or negotiation is a form of cooperative decision making within a mixed-motive setting. The task of conflict resolution is to reconcile individual needs or opinions, and the emphasis is on the cooperative over the competitive tendencies present. Structuralist premises, in contrast, stress the competitive side of the mixed-motive dilemma, indicate that conflict will "pop up time and time again" even if position occupants change, and stipulate that conflict resolution requires a structural change. While both structuralist and interpersonal premises are useful and important for some purposes, the former are underrepresented in existing bargaining literature.¹

Particularly noteworthy is that if conflict is structurally based, then, *ceteris paribus*, conflict resolution will likely be quite problematic. Thus, in more concrete terms, the probability of agreement on a specific issue or set of issues is an important phenomenon (i.e., dependent variable) to explain, *independent* of the nature of agreement. Economic and game theoretical approaches to bargaining assume an agreement—given the game—and attempt to predict the nature of that agreement (Rapoport 1966; Harsanyi 1977). While some sort of agreement is inevitable in some contexts, there are many social contexts where reaching any agreement is

quite difficult. Our approach assumes a much lower probability of agreement than game theoretical analyses imply. Being more problematic, the likelihood of conflict resolution is a critical dependent variable.

Actors' Latitude

Our second broad assumption qualifies the structural premises. Specifically, parties interpret, translate, or otherwise concretize their structurally embedded interests (see Bacharach and Lawler 1981a; Neale and Bazerman 1991) and choose tactics on this basis. They can bridge differences, find common ground, and otherwise mitigate structurally based conflict. They also can risk exacerbation of the conflict, or pursue violence, intimidation, or coercion. More generally, the social structure fostering conflict frames the action of parties and establishes an implicit agenda, but the parties interpret, refine, and complete this agenda in the course of bargaining (Strauss 1978). Given bargainers' choice or "latitude," occupants of positions with divergent interests may produce consequences that do not necessarily follow from the social structure (e.g., Strauss 1978; Cook and Emerson 1978; Bacharach and Lawler 1981a, 1981b; Molm 1990). Parties with smaller power capabilities may achieve greater influence than those with larger power capabilities, and tactics designed to gain advantage in the immediate situation may produce integrative rather than divisive effects on the long-run relationship. Overall, a structuralist approach that fails to treat "bargaining actors as agents" and the bargaining process as emergent will thereby confront anomalous findings stemming from bargainers' latitude.

BACKGROUND

Concept of Bargaining

Bargaining is a mixed-motive situation in which two or more parties engage in moves and countermoves to resolve or manage a conflict (Rubin and Brown 1975; Pruitt 1981; Bacharach and Lawler 1980). Bargaining takes one of two general forms, explicit or tacit (Schelling 1960).

Explicit bargaining entails a prior decision by parties to consider, if not actively seek, a compromise solution to the conflict (Chertkoff and Esser 1976; Bacharach and Lawler 1980). In this context, they mutually acknowledge a bargaining relationship, perceive the issues in terms of a range of possible solutions, and employ direct lines of communication to make offers and counteroffers along an issue dimension. Conflict resolution involves an explicit, and often formal, mutual agreement. This form of bargaining is important because it brings forth a conflict issue for mutual definition and analysis, allowing parties to control or manage their structurally based conflicts of interest.

Tacit bargaining refers primarily to parties' efforts to outmaneuver each other and reach an unstated, implicit "bargain" favoring their own interests (Schelling 1960; Strauss 1978). Parties acknowledge a conflict without consenting or being able to "sit at the bargaining table" (figuratively), do not clearly see a range of possible solutions, and resolve or manage the conflict through some sort of *tacit coordination*. Such bargaining tends to occur "from a distance" and lack the open lines of communication crucial to explicit bargaining (Bacharach and Lawler 1980,

ch. 6). As an example, Axelrod's (1984) recent work on the development of cooperation shows how tacit coordination can emerge from the tactics of parties involved in tacit bargaining.²

Contexts that appear purely conflictual usually harbor tacit bargaining. Subtle forms also may occur in group or organizational contexts where bargaining is not socially defined as legitimate or where rules limit severely the range of possible solutions. In either case, explicit bargaining often follows a period of tacit bargaining in which communication is limited and actors define the issues in win/lose terms. Explicit bargaining becomes possible when parties can and do mutually define the issues as open to a range of compromise solutions. In this sense, it is an important step toward conflict resolution or management, but also fraught with danger to the parties. The danger stems from a variety of sources, including uncertainty about the other's intentions or response to either conciliatory or hostile tactics (Lindskold 1978; Patchen 1987), ambiguity about the short- or long-term payoffs from viable solutions, and prospective image losses. Clearly, parties who enter explicit bargaining confront a difficult interpretive or cognitive task that affects their success at representing their group's interests (see Schelling 1960; Strauss 1978; Bacharach and Lawler 1981a). Assessments of the power relationship are important, if not critical, to the cognitive or interpretive task bargainers face (Bacharach and Lawler 1976).

The work we integrate assumes an explicit bargaining situation and takes power as the starting point for understanding it. After some interesting early work by economists (Dunlop 1950; Chamberlain 1955; Leap and Grisby 1986) and social psychologists (Thibaut and Kelley 1959; Deutsch and Krauss 1962), most bargaining literature has given short shrift to power. In fact, it barely appears in some reviews (e.g., Pruitt 1981). However, sociologists with a social-exchange perspective have increasingly confronted and resolved historic problems with the concept, resulting in greater potential for theorizing about bargaining power (see Emerson 1972;

Cook and Emerson 1978; Bacharach and Lawler 1981a, 1981b; Cook, Emerson, Gillmore, and Yamagishi 1983; Heckathorn 1985; Lawler 1986; Molm 1987, 1988, 1990; Markovsky, Willer, and Patton 1988; Yitzhak and Zelditch 1989). Sociologists also tend to bring a structuralist premise to such work.

Approach to Power

In a rather confusing history within both the larger sociological literature on power as well as bargaining literature, power has been conceptualized in three primary ways (see Bacharach and Lawler 1981a; Molm 1990): (1) as a potential or capability to influence the opponent (e.g., Bierstedt 1950; Chamberlain 1955; Wrong 1968; Emerson 1972); (2) as a process in which tactical actions—whether effective or not—seek to influence an opponent (Tedeschi and Bonoma 1972; Blalock 1989; Strauss 1978); and (3) as a result or outcome of an influence process, that is, as actual or realized power (Dunlop 1950; Dahl 1957; Gray and Tallman 1987; Willer, Markovsky, and Patton 1989). These emphases actually constitute three complementary facets of power processes, each important to understanding bargaining.

Elaborating other social exchange formulations (e.g., Cook and Emerson 1978; Molm 1987, 1990; Markovsky, Willer, and Patton 1988), we conceptualize power capability, power use, and actual power as distinct moments of a power process. In any power process, therefore, parties have some capability to affect each other's outcomes, an option to use that capability, and an uncertain probability of success. Using social exchange theory, power capabilities are based on the social structure in which the relationship of parties is embedded (Emerson 1972; Cook and Emerson 1978; Cook et al. 1983), a variety of specific tactical actions can use power

(Bacharach and Lawler 1981a, 1981b; Molm 1990), and successful use produces actual or realized power at a given point in time (Cook et al. 1983; Markovsky, Willer, and Patton 1988; Willer, Markovsky, and Patton 1989). For example, unions negotiating with management have some structurally based capability to apply leverage (e.g., workers difficult to replace, a sizeable strike fund), make tactical decisions about whether and how to use such capability, and achieve variable degrees of influence through such tactics.

These rather sharp distinctions between power capability, power-use, and actual or realized power raise a number of questions, such as: When do actors use their power capability? If used, what tactical form does power-use take? When does use of a power capability produce actual power or influence? Are there conditions where a structural power capability itself—without power-use (i.e., action)—produces actual influence? These are important theoretical questions. However, some are dismissed by conceptions of power that fail to maintain the analytic and empirical distinction of the above three facets or moments of the power process (e.g., Willer, Markovsky, and Patton 1989). Moreover, theoretical frameworks or measures that equate power with actual influence essentially define away such theoretical questions (e.g., Dahl 1957; Dunlop 1950).

POWER IN RELATIONSHIPS

Our approach adopts the basic premises of power dependence theory (Emerson 1962, 1972) but emphasizes more than Emerson and his colleagues (1) its implicit nonzero-sum conception of power, (2) the related role of mutual dependence or what Emerson (1972) terms “relational cohesion,” and (3) *power-use* as tactics that may or may not influence the flow of resources from the other (cf. Bacharach and Lawler 1981a; Lawler and Bacharach 1987 with Cook and Emerson 1978; Cook et al. 1983). Similar to Emerson, power is treated as a structurally based capability, defined as the “potential cost which a party can induce on another” (Emerson 1972, p. 64). Dependence reflects one type of “potential cost” (i.e., opportunity cost).

The Nonzero-Sum Assumption

The cornerstone of our theory is a nonzero-sum conception of power (e.g., see Bacharach and Lawler 1981a, 1981b; Lawler and Bacharach 1986, 1987; Lawler 1986; Lawler, Ford, and Blegen 1988; Lawler and Yoon 1990). Zero-sum approaches to power assume a fixed sum of power in a relationship, such that change in one party’s power capability produces an equal and opposite change in the other’s power. By definition, there is a perfect negative correlation between the power capability of A and the power capability of B. In contrast, a nonzero-sum conception indicates that the absolute or total amount of power in a relationship is not fixed, but variable. Because the total or absolute amount of power in a relationship can vary, the power of both parties could conceivably move in the same direction. Both parties might increase or

decrease in power or, of course, one might gain power capability while the other's remains constant or diminishes.

To illustrate, a zero-sum approach implies that a union that increases its own power automatically decreases management's power, while a nonzero-sum approach suggests that both union and management might increase their power over each other (e.g., a union builds its strike fund as management builds inventories to support a lockout). The vast majority of approaches to power adopt a zero-sum conception in practice if not always in principle. In fact, such a view seems to be woven, often implicitly, into the fabric of most analyses of power in bargaining and also beyond, despite periodic critiques (e.g., Gamson 1968; Kanter 1977).

Upon close examination, power dependence theory offers a point of departure for incorporating a nonzero-sum feature into analyses of power. From that theory, the power capability of party A is based on the dependence of party B on party A for valued resources or outcomes. In a dyadic relation, each party's power capability is based on the other's dependence (Emerson 1962, 1972). The level of dependence is determined in turn by (1) the value of the resources or outcomes received from the other, and (2) the availability of alternative parties from whom such resources (or substitutable ones) can be acquired. Therefore, party A's power (P_{ab}) is a function of the value B attributes to resources received from A and the degree to which B has alternative sources, while party B's power (P_{ba}) is a function of the value A attributes to resources received from B and the degree to which A has alternative sources.

Notice that each party's power is based on the *other's* dependence on them, not their own dependence on the other. This is the source of the nonzero-sum assumption implicit in power dependence theory. Theoretically, each party's absolute power (P_{ab} and P_{ba}) is not related, a

priori, in a specified way. We seek to develop the nonzero-sum implication of power dependence theory, both theoretically and empirically.

A Basic Theoretical Contrast

The nonzero-sum implications of power dependence theory lead Bacharach and Lawler (1981a) to propose a distinction between the “total power” *in the relationship* and the “relative power” of the parties in that relationship. The unit of analysis is the single relation or dyad. Total power refers to the sum of each party’s absolute power (i.e., $P_{ab} + P_{ba}$); relative power refers to the power difference or ratio of each party’s absolute power (i.e., $P_{ab}/[P_{ab} + P_{ba}]$). Given equal power, shifts upward or downward in total power involve proportional changes in the degree of mutual dependence or what Emerson (1972) terms “relational cohesion” and Molm (1987, 1989) terms “average power.” Shifts in relative power entail either a redistribution of existing power in the relationship or an unequal distribution of changes in total power.

Importantly, relative and total power can change in a variety of interesting and somewhat independent ways. If two nations over time become the exclusive providers of valued commodities, the total power in the relationship grows without changing relative power, as long as the net growth of each party’s absolute power is equal. By the same token, if actors in a close relationship each develop their own set of friends, total power—and, hence, relational cohesion—declines without necessarily changing their relative power. However, if only one person develops a set of friends, both total and relative power change, though in this case all of the change in total power would be an artifact of the change in relative power.

Some illustrations further clarify the importance of this distinction. Assume that each party's absolute power can vary from 1 to 10 units and, therefore, that total power in the relationship can vary between 2 and 20 units. A nonzero-sum conception leads one to suspect that a relationship where each party has 2 units of power capability produces different rates of conflict behavior from a relationship where each has 9 units of power capability. If a relationship with a distribution of 2 *units for A* and 8 *for B* changes to one with 4 *for A* and 6 *for B*, relative power shifts but total power does not. A more complex situation would involve simultaneous changes in both total and relative power, such as a move from 2 units of power for A and 8 for B to 4 for A and 7 for B. A nonzero-sum conception of power addresses such patterns of change, while a zero-sum approach attends only to the power differences.

The distinction between relative and total power also applies to coercive or punitive forms of power. Lawler (1986) recently explicated and developed a theory of bilateral deterrence that incorporates both facets of power as distinct causal factors. One implication of his theoretical analysis is that traditional work on coercive (i.e., punitive) capability and threats or punishments tends to confound relative power (or power differences) with total power in the relationship, making it difficult to determine whether observed effects of power capability are due to the relative power of the parties or the total power in their relationship (e.g., Deutsch and Krauss 1962; Hornstein 1965; Smith and Leginski 1970; Michener and Cohen 1973; Rubin and Brown 1975). Thus, effects often attributed to power differences in some classic social psychological literature on conflict may be due, in part, to differences in total power across experimental conditions. Hornstein's (1965) study exemplifies this problem (see Lawler 1986 for more discussion).

Power-Use as Tactics

Emerson's (1962) early work represented each of the four dimensions of dependence as a target for tactical action, that is, a way to gain a power advantage (Michener and Suchner 1972; Lawler and Bacharach 1976). Power dependence relations could be manipulated tactically by the parties, and such efforts to change the power relationship ostensibly persist except under conditions of power balance (Emerson 1962). This early emphasis on tactics for changing power relationships and the related hint of a theory of power struggle receded as Emerson and his colleagues turned their attention to more general social exchange processes (Cook and Emerson 1978; Cook et al. 1983). Balance became an equilibrium point for social exchange (see Heckathorn 1983), rather than a somewhat unstable result of parties attempting to gain advantage.

We stress the tactical emphasis of power dependence theory and develop its application to a range of conflict and bargaining issues. A tactic refers to a move or set of moves directed at influencing an opponent's cognitions or behavior in a conflict. The goal of a tactic might be to punish the other, test their resolve, gain information about them, present or maintain an identity, or foster a particular definition of the situation (Pruitt 1981; Strauss 1978). While tactics obviously serve various purposes, key is that they are a response to a "problem"—namely, the actual or anticipated resistance from another party—and, as such, are calculative or deliberative (Strauss 1978). Tactics flow from conscious or nonconscious deliberation in which power is estimated, options assessed, and consequences anticipated.

The nonzero-sum conception of power leads us to distinguish between tactics that use an existing power capability (*power-use tactics*) and those that can change the power relationship in

an ongoing struggle (*power-change tactics*) such as between labor and management, divisions in an organization, or particular nations (Bacharach and Lawler 1981b; Blegen and Lawler 1989). A threat to leave the relationship exemplifies a “power- use” tactic, while the development of alternative relationships exemplifies a “power-change” tactic (upon which future threats-to-leave might be based). Power-use tactics deal with the immediate conflict of interest parties face in explicit bargaining, while power- change tactics essentially prepare for future conflicts in addition to possibly dealing with the immediate one. Our theorizing bears on both types, but has focused on power-use tactics.

Two major classes of power-use tactics are relevant to explicit bargaining: conciliatory and hostile. The former are positive acts, communicating a willingness to coordinate or collaborate; the latter are negative acts, communicating an inclination toward competition, intimidation, and resistance (see Pruitt 1981 for a related discussion). In explicit bargaining, concession-making (i.e., concession tactics) is a major form of conciliation, and levying damage (i.e., damage tactics) a major form of hostility. Conciliatory tactics attempt to produce mutual accommodation, and hostile tactics attempt to pressure or force opponent concessions.

POWER CAPABILITY AND POWER-USE

Our major concern is the impact of power capability on power-use as defined above. In this section, we address two questions suggested by the distinction between relative and total power. First, how does the total power in a relationship affect the use of conciliatory and hostile tactics in bargaining? Second, how does relative power (i.e., equal vs. unequal) affect use of conciliatory and hostile tactics? Two core propositions offer broad answers to these questions:

1. *Total Power Proposition*: Given equal power between two parties in bargaining, higher levels of total power in the relationship decrease hostility and increase conciliation.
2. *Relative Power Proposition*: Given each party has a “significant” amount of absolute power, a relationship with unequal power produces more hostility and less conciliation than a relationship with equal power.

These core propositions capture and integrate the broadest implications of two distinct branches of theoretical and empirical work, one on *power dependence* (see Bacharach and Lawler 1981a; Lawler and Bacharach 1987) and one on *punitive power* (Lawler 1986; Lawler, Ford, and Blegen 1988). These branches are fully complementary but differ in the structural form of power analyzed (i.e., dependence vs. punitive or coercive), the type of costs power-use inflicts on the opponent (i.e., opportunity costs vs. retaliation costs), the primary dependent variable (conciliation vs. hostility), and the explanatory framework (power dependence theory vs. bilateral deterrence theory). Below we elaborate the connection of these propositions to work on power dependence and bilateral deterrence processes.

The total power proposition is implicit in Emerson's power dependence theory and also some theorizing on deterrence in international relations (Emerson 1972; Morgan 1977; Blalock 1989). In power dependence terms, total power constitutes the level of mutual dependence or "relational cohesion" in the relationship. It suggests that higher total power or mutual dependence increases opportunity costs of leaving the relationship or concluding the bargaining without an agreement. Higher total power essentially raises the stake in reaching a reasonable conclusion. Bargaining in relationships with high, rather than low, total power, therefore, should be more cooperative, take less time, and produce more agreements.

A second tradition, found in one part of the deterrence literature on international relations, also supports this idea—namely, the literature that deals with the control over violence in a bilateral power relationship over time (e.g., Morgan 1977; Thompson 1986; Houweling and Siccama 1988). The maintenance of large power capabilities to forestall hostile action is what Morgan (1977) terms "general deterrence." If two parties develop and maintain high levels of coercive power (i.e., capability to damage each other), each ostensibly uses that capability less because of a fear of retaliation. Together, power dependence and bilateral deterrence literatures suggest that the primary reason high total power produces less power use is the type of costs attached to power use—opportunity costs in the case of power dependence versus retaliation costs in the case of deterrence.

Some social psychological research contradicts the total power proposition. This is illustrated by the classic line of work initiated by Deutsch and Krauss (1962). Using their famous trucking game, they found that the mere existence of a power capability leads to its use and use in turn produces a punishment/counterpunishment spiral. While this research has been criticized on both theoretical and methodological grounds, its fundamental ideas remain plausible. Higher levels of

total power may indeed tempt use and, once used, foster reciprocation, especially in an equal power relationship (Rubin and Brown 1975; Youngs 1986). The temptation power capabilities create for each party mediate this conflict spiral process.

To clarify and explicate the difference between deterrence and trucking-game traditions, Lawler (1986) recently developed contrasting theoretical formulations for “bilateral deterrence” and “conflict spiral” processes. The theories use somewhat different intervening cognitions to predict the impact of coercive capabilities on use of hostile tactics. For the equal power case, bilateral deterrence theory indicates that if the power capability of both parties increases, then each develops a higher fear of retaliation and a lower expectation of attack that in turn *reduces* the use of hostile tactics. Conflict spiral theory stipulates that if the power capability of both increases, then each is more tempted to use power and develops higher expectations of attack that in turn *enhance* the use of hostile tactics (see Lawler 1986 and Lawler, Ford, and Blegen 1988 for more detailed discussion). Aside from greater empirical support to date (discussed below), bilateral deterrence theory has the advantage of theoretically complementing power dependence theory. Its implications for hostile behavior dovetail with those of power dependence for concession behavior and, more generally, bilateral deterrence theory seems to capture part of the implicit logic underlying the power-dependence view on the impact of mutual dependence.

Turning to relative power, the core proposition suggests that unequal power relationships are less stable in bargaining. One reason is dissensus over the legitimacy of the power differences or whether and how such differences should affect the negotiated solution. In an unequal power relationship, the disadvantaged party may resist agreements that reflect their power position, while the advantaged party may hold out for precisely those that provide them a payoff proportional to their power advantage (Bacharach and Lawler 1981a, ch. 7). Some common

features of explicit bargaining should accentuate the tendency of unequal power to foster instability. For example, the “mutual consent” should create pressures toward equality and provide the lower-power party a readymade rationale for contesting a close connection between power inequalities and bargaining outcomes. Furthermore, given intergroup bargaining, constituents of the higher-power party will likely form expectations about the ultimate agreement and exert pressure that reflects their interests. In other words, when conflict occurs in a relationship with unequal power *and explicit bargaining develops*, the legitimacy of power differences will likely come under dispute, complicating the agenda.

Emerson’s power dependence theory and Lawler’s (1986) bilateral deterrence theory specify somewhat different, though complementary, processes through which unequal power enhances conflict. Power dependence theory suggests that such relationships tend toward equality (i.e., “balance” in Emerson’s terms) through one or both of the following processes. First, the higher-power party will use power (i.e., extract more benefit), thereby inflicting costs (i.e., value foregone) on the opponent, which over time reduces the lower-power party’s dependence. Second, the lower-power party adopts power-change tactics that either increase the higher-power party’s dependence (e.g., by forming coalitions with similar others) or decrease their own dependence (Cook and Gillmore 1984). Through such processes, power balance will develop over time in imbalanced (or unequal) power relations. Clearly power dependence attempts to explain the longer-term impact of unequal power in an ongoing relationship.

Complementing power dependence theory, Lawler’s bilateral deterrence formulation suggests that unequal power fosters instability in the short term or within a particular bargaining episode (Lawler 1986). It indicates that under unequal power, both the lower- and higher-power parties are more likely to use power, but for different reasons. The higher- power party uses

power because of a lower fear of retaliation, inferred from the opponent's smaller power capability, while the lower-power party uses power because of higher expectations of attack, generated by the opponent's power capability. The confluence of a lower fear of retaliation for the higher-power party and a higher expectation of attack for the lower-power party produces more power use by both parties under unequal, as opposed to equal, power.³ Together, power dependence and bilateral deterrence notions suggest that power differences have long- and short-term effects, respectively, on tactical action.

EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE

Power dependence and punitive power variants of laboratory research have tested implications of the core propositions above. The power dependence variant stresses concession tactics and, more specifically, the impact of dimensions of dependence (i.e., the value of the outcomes at stake or the availability of alternative bargaining opponents) on the toughness of concession behavior and probability of agreement (e.g., Bacharach and Lawler 1981a). The punitive power variant analyzes the effect of coercive or punitive capabilities on the frequency of tactics that damage the opponent's resources (Lawler 1986; Lawler, Ford, and Blegen 1988). These variants reflect an assumption that dependence and coercion are somewhat distinct forms of power capability (see Lawler and Bacharach 1987).

To elaborate the contrast of dependence and coercive forms of power, consider the sense in which this amounts to a difference between *opportunity costs* and *retaliation costs* (Tedeschi, Bonoma, and Novinson 1970; Lawler and Bacharach 1987). Opportunity costs are benefits foregone by retaining the bargaining relationship. The withdrawal of or refusal to provide

benefits increases the opponent's opportunity costs of staying in the relationship by reducing the difference between the benefit from within the relation and the prospective benefit from an alternative. "Retaliation costs" are punitive and can be inflicted beyond the mere withdrawal or refusal of benefits. Coercive power, for example, might be used to "add on" punitive damage to an opponent who makes "insufficient" concessions or withdraws from bargaining. Thus, the opportunity costs intrinsic to Emerson's power dependence theory only compare *benefits* from the current bargaining relationship to those anticipated from alternative ones, while retaliation costs imply that parties can directly damage resources not under negotiation. These different forms of power could be subsumed theoretically under power dependence theory (see Molm 1987). However, it should be noted that research suggests some important differences in the sort of effects these forms of power capability have in bargaining as well as other social settings (e.g., Gray and Tallman 1987; Molm 1988, 1989; Lawler and Bacharach 1987).⁴

Overview of Experimental Setting

The research uses a fairly standard two-party laboratory setting in which subjects exchange offers on a distributive issue across a number of bargaining rounds (e.g., Chertkoff and Esser 1976). In some experiments, they also can levy punitive damage on each round (e.g., Michener and Cohen 1973). The parties lack information on each other's payoffs at the various solution points and, to give the bargaining an intergroup character, subjects are placed in the role of representing a hypothetical group in conflict with another group. Subjects are oriented to maximize their own group's payoffs without regard to those of the opponent group.

In this general context, the power dependence relationship is manipulated by varying the nature of the agreement anticipated from an alternative bargaining opponent (see Bacharach and Lawler 1981a, ch. 3; Lawler and Bacharach 1987).⁵ Coercive or punitive capability is manipulated by altering the maximum amount of the other's resources open to destruction, for example, 10% versus 90% (see Lawler, Ford, and Blegen 1988). With the exception of two studies that simultaneously incorporate both dependence and punitive capability (e.g., Lawler and Bacharach 1987), each experiment focuses on either power dependence and concessions or coercive capability and punitive tactics.

The dyad is the unit of analysis. Conciliation is measured by the magnitude of total yielding in the dyad (averaging both parties' concession magnitude); punitive damage by the frequency of damage tactics in the dyad. The magnitude of damage produced by a single instance of power use is held constant within each dyad. The theories concern only the overall rate or level of conciliation and hostility in the relationship, regardless of time, although analyses by time have been conducted. The following summary of evidence focuses on findings replicated at least once within the research program.

Power Dependence Evidence

The most important result from several experiments on power dependence and concession behavior is that higher total dependence (holding relative dependence constant) in a relationship promotes higher rates of concession-making and also more agreements on a distributive issue. The average concession-making across bargainers is higher when each has poor, as opposed to good, alternatives (Bacharach and Lawler 1981a; Lawler and Bacharach

1987). Moreover, agreement rates are higher under similar conditions—usually above 50% (e.g., 75%, 63%) when each party has an alternative bargainer from whom they are likely to receive a poor agreement, and under 50% (e.g., 13%, 19%) when the converse holds (Bacharach and Lawler 1981a; Lawler and Bacharach 1987). These “relational cohesion” effects, noted in Emerson’s (1972) brief discussion of mutual dependence, reflect the opportunity costs of opting for alternatives.⁶ Overall, power dependence research supports the total power proposition.

The applicability of the relative power proposition to power dependence is somewhat more complex. The earliest research of the program, focused exclusively on power dependence and concession behavior, shows higher rates of agreement when parties have equal rather than unequal power (Bacharach and Lawler 1981a); however, later work, which incorporates both dependence and punitive forms of power, finds such effects when (1) parties are equal on *both* dependence and punitive capability (a condition present in the earlier work) and (2) their mutual dependence is high (Lawler and Bacharach 1987). Thus, research basically supports the relative power proposition but suggests that the effects of dependence and punitive forms of power on concession tactics could interact in potentially important ways.

Bilateral Deterrence Evidence

Bilateral deterrence theory specifies comparable links between punitive capabilities and punitive damage (Lawler 1986). The total power hypothesis is that higher levels of absolute power in the relationship reduce the use of damage tactics. Recall that higher levels of coercive capability lead each party to fear retaliation in the event that they use their own capability and, also, to develop lower expectations of attack. The relative power hypothesis is that unequal

power produces more use of damage tactics than equal power. Recall the assumption that higher- and lower-power parties will weigh differently select cognitive inferences from the coercive capabilities. The former responds primarily to the reduced fear of retaliation, and the latter to the higher expectation of attack. The predicted result, therefore, is more frequent use of punitive damage by *both* higher- and lower- power parties (Lawler 1986).⁷

These hypotheses, linking coercive capability to punitive damage, receive substantial empirical support. In two studies, the total coercive capability negatively impacts the use of damage tactics (Lawler and Bacharach 1987; Lawler, Ford, and Blegen 1988). One of these studies suggests that this occurs mainly in the latter phases of bargaining after parties have experienced the negative consequences of power use (Lawler, Ford, and Blegen 1988). In support of the relative power hypotheses, damage is inflicted more frequently by *both* actors under unequal than equal power; and, higher- and lower-power parties do not differ significantly in their rate of using damage tactics (Lawler and Bacharach 1987; Lawler, Ford, and Blegen 1988). Similar, though weaker, results occur for concession behavior. Relationships with high total power show larger concessions than those with low, and equal power produces more yielding than unequal power.

One of the most interesting results is that in unequal power relationships, parties with lower power resist when they have significant absolute power, because they expect hostile action by the higher-power opponent. The tendency to respond in a hostile way to expectation of attack, even before such an attack actually occurs, receives attention in Schelling's (1960) classic work and also some support in social psychological literature on influence tactics in conflict or bargaining (e.g., Tedeschi, Bonoma, and Novinson 1970). This "resistance effect" may occur primarily in bargaining settings when disparate social groups are pitted against one another and

the unequal power relationship lacks the normative legitimation found typically in social groups or formal organizations (also, see Note 3).

IMPLICATIONS FOR POWER STRUGGLE OVER TIME

Explicit bargaining is a method of conflict resolution entailing some level of mutual consent and commitment to consider compromise. The mere fact of explicit bargaining (*ceteris paribus*) suggests that parties see some prospect or need for collaboration. With structurally based conflict, however, unless bargaining produces structural changes in the power relationship, the fundamental mixed-motive pressures toward conflict on the one hand and resolution on the other should remain constant. Conflicting issues may get resolved, but will also continue to arise.

The concept of total power in an ongoing relationship has important implications for structural changes that will alter the pressures toward conflict versus collaboration. The basic theoretical proposal is that *parties in an ongoing relationship, in which conflict and bargaining occurs regularly, strive to improve their power position by either increasing their own or decreasing the other's absolute power*. We term such efforts “power struggle,” in which parties vie for advantage through power change tactics. Balance in Emerson’s terms, therefore, should be an unstable state since parties who expect future conflicts still have an incentive to improve their structural power position. The difference between balance and imbalance is a quantitative, not qualitative, one. Emerson’s condition of structural balance, is subject—in this sense—to problems similar to those of mutual cooperation in an iterative prisoner-dilemma game (Axelrod 1984).

The idea of total power suggests that individual efforts to gain advantage can inadvertently produce structural changes that alter the fundamental pressures toward conflict resolution. We take mutual or total dependence as the primary structural source of pressure toward conflict resolution and argue that the joint effects of each bargainer's tactical patterns can produce changes in mutual dependence as can external third parties—such as allies, arbitrators, or political authorities. Specifically, power dependence theory suggests two primary ways for a party to improve their structural power position, by (1) decreasing their own dependence or (2) increasing the opponent's dependence. If both parties decrease their own dependence over time by, for example, developing alternative outcomes sources, mutual dependence declines and the conflict issues that emerge should be more difficult to resolve.⁸ In contrast, if each party increases the other's dependence mutual dependence grows and, correspondingly, so does the structural pressure toward conflict resolution. In sum, if parties repeatedly and effectively use the same class of power- change tactics, their individual efforts to gain advantage alter the structure of the power relationship such that the fundamental pressures toward conflict resolution change. Depending on the nature of these changes, the result is an integrative or disintegrative impact on the relationship (see Bacharach and Lawler 1980 and Lawler and Bacharach 1986).

The notion of total power also has implications for how dyadic power struggle within a larger social network can transform the network. Given the analytic difference between the value and alternative dimensions of power dependence, changes in total power on these dimensions should have different affects on a larger network. For example, if mutual dependence increases because parties provide each other with more valued resources over time, then the parties should become more committed to each other and their relationships with others in the network should become weaker. If, on the other hand, mutual dependence increases because each party forms

coalitions with the other's alternatives, then the density of the larger network grows. Thus, an increase in dyadic total power can differentially affect the larger network contingent on which dependence dimension accounts for the increase in total power. An increase in dyadic mutual dependence along the value dimension may have a disintegrative effect on the larger network, while an increase in dyadic mutual dependence along the alternatives dimension may have an integrative effect. The impact of dyadic power processes on larger networks warrants further attention.

CONCLUSION

The lines of research that compose this program of theoretical work on power capabilities and power use suggest two general inferences, reflected in our core propositions. First, the total amount or mutuality of power in a bargaining relationship is an important foundation for both conciliatory and hostile tactics. Higher total power (given equal power) tends to increase conciliatory tactics and decrease hostile tactics. Second, unequal power tends to decrease conciliatory tactics and increase hostile tactics. Furthermore, given unequal power, the rate of power use may not reflect, proportionately, the relative power of parties. Lower-power parties may use their available power as much as high-power parties in an effort to overcome or minimize the prospective impact of their power on bargaining outcomes.

The theoretical distinction of relative and total power is fruitful in part because each has distinct empirical consequences, frequently confounded in analyses of power. Further, the two core propositions on relative and total power integrate commonalities between dependence and punitive forms of power. Such commonalities suggest the potential for a theory of power that

subsumes both dependence and punitive forms, while also taking account of their differences.

One option is to broaden power dependence theory to explicitly incorporate coercive forms of power capability (see Molm 1987 for such an approach). A second option is to broaden bilateral deterrence theory (Lawler 1986) in an effort to subsume predictions from power dependence theory and develop a new theory around the relative and total propositions specified here.

Notes

1. Clearly, structural conditions can facilitate cooperation, and interpersonal conditions competition. The two approaches differ in emphasis, which, we argue, affects how bargaining is analyzed theoretically. If interests are attached to structural positions, certain questions or issues (i.e., the impact of power capability) will more likely receive attention than otherwise.
2. When laboratory settings use actual payoff matrices, bargaining tends to be tacit rather than explicit. A clear bargaining issue with a range of possible solutions is missing, communication constricted, and provisional offers and counteroffers not really possible. Iterative prisoner-dilemma games may capture the interchanges of labor and management and nations in conflict outside of explicit bargaining, but inadequately represent explicit bargaining. However, it is of note that explicit and tacit bargaining typically coexist in real world settings.
3. The prediction that both the lower- and higher-power party will be more likely to use their power capability than in an equal power relationship (Lawler 1986; Lawler and Bacharach 1987; Lawler, Ford, and Blegen 1988) is contrary to the conventional notion that under unequal power high-power parties exploit their advantage and low-power parties submit (see Rubin and Brown 1975; Pruitt 1981). Bilateral deterrence suggests an important, perhaps far-reaching, exception to the general rule. When the lower-power party has a “significant” amount of absolute power and engages in explicit bargaining over conflict, it will likely show resistance. Expecting attack, the lower-power party ostensibly uses power to communicate a willingness to inflict costs on the higher- power opponent even at substantial cost to itself (Schelling 1960). Of course, further theoretical and empirical work is needed on the conditions creating such a result.

4. Also important is to recognize how dependence and coercive forms of power interrelate in Emerson's (1972) formulation. Specifically, the dependence of X on Y limits the use of coercive power by Y. To illustrate, given X's dependence on Y is based on the benefit received from Y (B_{yx}) and also some benefit can be expected from an alternative partner Z (B_{zx}), Y's use of punitive tactics cannot reduce B_{yx} to B_{zx} without driving X from the relationship. In fact, virtually any punishment reduces the dependence of X on Y as it diminishes B_{yx} . In this sense, "to use power is to lose it" (Emerson 1972).

5. The early studies also manipulate the maximum monetary winnings to investigate the other dimension of power dependence, namely, the value of the outcomes at stake (Bacharach and Lawler 1981a). Such results depart from those for the alternatives dimension and also from the predictions of power dependence theory. In general, when potential outcomes are highly valued, parties exert more effort to overcome tactically the power capability such high value gives to an opponent, for example, by reducing concessions (see Lawler and Bacharach 1979; Bacharach and Lawler 1981b for further discussion of this effect).

6. Emerson's (1972) idea of relational cohesion concerns only variations in total power (also, see Molm 1989, 1990). However, given our distinction between relative and total power, the notion of relational cohesion should be extended to incorporate variations in relative power (power differences). Such modification of relational cohesion is underway (Lawler and Yoon 1990).

7. Bilateral deterrence theory specifies only the basic relationship of coercive *capability* to its use, treating capability as a structural foundation. Caution is needed regarding the application of this theory to the arms-race. The theory assumes a context for which punitive tactics are not so severe in their consequences that they cannot occur repeatedly. In addition, it assumes a

relationship in which the deterrent effects of the punitive capability are not “perfect,” that is, punitive tactics occur frequently enough to compare rates across power conditions.

8. Of course, if mutual dependence diminishes over a long period, parties grow independent enough to resolve their conflicts by mutual avoidance.

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