

## **ALLIANCES: SANCTIONING AND MONITORING**

**Bernard Guerin**

*Psychology Department, University of South Australia, Australia*

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### **Summary**

The basic strategy for overcoming resources problems and dilemmas is to work in groups: families, partnerships, states, tribes, nations, etc. Belonging to a group becomes a powerful resource since it gives access to most resources for life. People therefore work hard to belong to a group. This strong effort to belong to groups produces two ways in which actions appear unusual and need analyses specific to the social sciences. First, some actions are analyzed as rituals, meaning that they function to keep the group working together and thus achieve access to resources. Outside of this context, they can appear non-beneficial or even detrimental to the individuals. Second, within groups, exchanges of resources are generalized, meaning that they can happen over time, through other people and in different contexts than the immediate one. This makes it difficult to analyze social control since actions appear to be unmotivated or “internally” motivated, and thus have given psychology a problem since its inception. The functioning of trust and status within group resource allocation is analyzed and shown to depend inherently upon the size of the group, leading to several group-size phenomena. The interplay of sanctioning individuals in groups and the monitoring and

then avoidance of monitoring are explored.

## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1. Groups and Alliances**

In looking at the structural aspects of conflict there were many suggestions that forming groups, coalitions or alliances of some sort was a key solution to conflicts (see *Structural Sources of Conflict*). For example, just communicating with another player in a Prisoner's Dilemma game was not sufficient to increase cooperation, and indeed it sometimes led to less cooperation, but having a stronger group association of trust, alliance, mutual reputation, social identity, group identity, or kinship could allow productive and on-going solutions to such dilemmas. This was true for each of the conflicts discussed in more detail: Prisoner's Dilemma, Chicken, Commons Dilemma, and Public Goods Dilemma (see *Structural Sources of Conflict* for a description of those dilemmas). Talking alone was not enough to make things happen; other historical and social conditions were necessary (see *The Language of Conflict*).

In some ways, then, alliances and groups can just be thought of as cooperation: players in games cooperating to overcome a social dilemma and thereby derive better outcomes. The type of group or alliance that is formed will therefore depend upon the size of the resource conflict. Family conflicts will differ from political conflicts, and these more specific historical and social contexts are discussed in other articles (see *Political Facets of Conflict*, *Institutional Facets of Conflict*, *Small Groups and Conflict*, *The Person and Conflict*, *Conflict Domains*).

In most cases, an individual has no control over their groups and alliances because the groups were formed before that individual was even born and are difficult to change (see *Social Change*, *Conflict and Conflict Resolution*). Often, too, the structural aspects of a conflict dictate what alliances will be formed. To give some examples of these points, changing alliances within a family household is feasible, and family coalitions can even change depending upon the situation: the children side with the father when they want to avoid a bath but side with the mother when they want a food treat. On the other hand, changing political alliances, and especially forming new ones, can be very difficult. New political parties have a difficult time forming no matter what their platforms. Finally, inherited institutional structures in Western bureaucracies make certain alliances almost (but not quite) inevitable: subordinates may be pitted against the boss, secretarial staff against the professionals, and workers against management.

### **1.2. Why the Social Sciences are Different I: Ritual or Group-Maintaining Activities**

Not only do groups and alliances provide answers and solutions to inevitable conflicts over resources, they also help us understand the less obvious aspects of human behavior. There is a whole range of problems for which the social sciences are very different from the physical sciences. People often seem to act irrationally or strangely, whereas planets and atoms act deterministically and repeatedly in the same way. People often seem to do things without good reasons, and often get hurt in processes they could

have easily avoided. Trees and rocks do not go jumping out of airplanes with parachutes, daring each other to drink more and more alcohol, working in highly stressful and dangerous environments in order to afford to buy a beach house they have no time to visit, subjecting themselves to initiations that injure them, or repeatedly assisting others with no noticeable benefits to themselves. These are the kind of actions that make the social sciences very different and very difficult to analyze. The “hard” sciences are in fact easier in this regard.

The point to note in such situations is that people are acting rationally, in a broader sense of the word, but the payoffs, outcomes or consequences are neither the obvious ones in the present circumstances nor even the ones that most people claim are the cause of their behaviour. This makes analyses in the social sciences more perplexing but at the same time more interesting. It means that new methods of investigation are required, not because humans are mysterious and different, but because the historical and social contexts are all-important for really understanding what is happening.

The models of structural aspects of conflict can only go so far; we must in all cases of analysis inquire into the historical and social contexts surrounding the events of interest. A few general properties of structural sources of conflict can lead to specific behaviors, as was outlined for the Chicken game, for example (see *The Chicken Game* in *Structural Sources of Conflict*). However, the particular details most often needed for analysis include detailed observations and knowledge about the people, their history, the current social context, and their resource allocations.

Social anthropologists have the expertise for discovering these historical and social contexts, since they have, over a long period of time, utilized methods of participation in and careful observation of the life of the people they are studying, at least to some degree. Historians do similar work but are usually restricted to reading written accounts and looking at material objects that have survived over time. Oral historians are now using methods that come closer to anthropological approaches, and sociologists likewise employ similar methods.

The first difference that is discovered when analyzing the activities of people, rather than analyzing the physics of a piece of wood, can be pieced together from two clues that have been mentioned:

- i) Forming alliances and groups is vitally important to people for solving conflicts and organizing resources.
- ii) Activities that are directed at maintaining such groups will become highly important in people’s lives even though the beneficial outcomes for doing them might not be immediately obvious to either observers or the people themselves.

Both of these points follow from what has been said. The strangest and most inexplicable activities to analyze are usually those that are directed at maintaining these all-important groups rather than anything that receives resources directly. Such activities are very difficult to analyze.

There is nothing mystical or magic about such activities but, because of the importance

of the alliances formed, there are a large number of them. Commonly, both social scientists and laypersons look to the immediate context for explanations of such activities, which can be misleading.

Many of these group-maintaining activities are called “rituals.” They are activities that are carried out because they help preserve the groups and alliances, and they might have no other function beyond that. For example, in Western civilizations, men often wear ties to their workplaces and sometimes to other places as well. This is not done to get an immediate resource, such as to keep their necks warm from the cold environment or so that they can nibble at their ties if they become hungry, but it is done to preserve their alliances with their bosses and their organizations. Wearing a tie in those organizations is a way of showing and maintaining the alliance and also helps the individuals gain in reputation and status within their groups (and hence have increased access to the resources of the groups). Sometimes it can have other functions -- in particular, some rituals are further utilized to differentiate one group from another as part of a group conflict game. For instance, the men in pink ties might be in conflict over resources with the men in red ties.

The most well-known examples of rituals are probably in the social anthropology literature. As part of alliance formation and maintenance, people utilize many activities. The same occurs, however, at all scales of size. Many unusual practices at state level and at the level of government parties can be understood in these ways. For example, a political party might begin preparing a discussion paper on controlling handguns but the party leader attends a rally to allow high-powered rifles to be bought freely. For analysis, the same principle usually follows, that strange or inconsistent actions usually mean that two different audiences, or in this case interest groups or alliances, are pressuring the two different actions. In order to please (keep an alliance with) the more radical party members who are perhaps beginning to leave the party, the political party makes a show (ritual) of looking at the question of restricting handguns. In order to please (ritual) the more conservative members, the party leader attends a public rally that promotes easy access to guns.

***Analysis Lens:*** The two main points of analysis that the reader really needs to keep in mind is that belonging to groups gives us *access* to almost all the resources we need for our lives, and that the activities that maintain those groups also become extremely important for very real reasons. Often, the way this occurs is very subtle, and we will find many difficulties recognizing and analyzing the resource implications and allocations through close groups. However, there is very little that we do that does not depend upon a family member, a friend or a bank, for assistance.

No matter how much you think you are an independent soul who is free from social constraints, unless you grow all your own food, you have no choice but to depend upon others. (In fact, the very condition of being able to imagine that you are free from social ties depends itself upon a very particular set of societal resource conditions, capitalism in particular.) Therefore, this means that gaining close relationships and maintaining them takes on extreme importance, and this importance can produce weird human social behaviors precisely because they do not have to be directly connected to the immediate material resources.

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### **Biographical Sketch**

**Bernard Guerin** is Professor in psychology at the University of South Australia. Before this he studied at the University of Adelaide, took a Post-Doctoral Fellowship at the University of Brisbane, and taught at James Cook University in Townsville, Australia. His interests span the entire realm of social science, and he has been concerned for some years about the superficial barriers erected between the "different" social sciences. He has finished two new books: one on integrating the social sciences and one on practical interventions to change the behavior of both individuals and communities, again incorporating all social science approaches. He has published over 45 peer-reviewed papers, and has presented this integrative material on invited visits to Japan, Mexico, Brazil, Hungary, Sardinia, and across the United States. His two earlier books are *Social Facilitation* (CUP) and *Analyzing Social Behavior: Behavior Analysis and the Social Sciences* (Context Press).