

Power, politics and environmental change
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Class 4: Power “from within”

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Introduction

- Purpose of the class
 - Explain how power operates besides coercion...
 - ...focus on 'power-less' but in a different way than Class 3...
 - ...and how this may influence environmental change
- Why should you know this?
 - A key idea of how power operates
- Outline
 - Discuss answers to question
 - Explaining the power from within approach and its premises on other theories
 - Exercise
 - Analytical implications: the role of nature and the role of humans in environmental change

Class question

- *“According to Robbins and his study, lawn managers who are **more aware** of the environmental impacts of chemicals, and are **more socially involved and concerned** about their communities, are those who **apply more intensively chemicals** on their lawns*
- *“**How** do Robbins’ middle-class lawn maintainers (“lawn people”) end up using chemicals which they know that are harmful not only for the environment but also to their own health?”*
- *“**Why** do they do this to themselves and the environment?”*

Why do they do it?

- Three reasons
 - Hectic lives: no free time
 - Economic/ instrumental logics
 - The good citizen: moral responsibility to the community

Hectic lifestyles

- “When I first moved here I was traveling a lot so I didn’t have time to do much in my yard. I thought, my lawn must need something, so I was treating it . . . I think of yard work as a fun activity . . . But I just don’t have the time anymore.”
- Residents stated, with some degree of pride, how busy they and their families are with careers, hobbies, sports, and travel
- This often translated into a feeling that they **did not have time** to worry about lawn chemicals

Economic/ instrumental logics

- Association of chemicals inputs with **housing values...**
 - which reach the homeowner
 - as well as neighborhood
- ...suggests obvious **instrumental motivations**
- Lawn upkeep: relatively **inexpensive investment** for maintaining property values
 - Note: SES system where homeowners **rewarded** for environmentally detrimental behavior!
- But instrumental thinking only a small part of this set of logics

Beyond instrumentalism: community

- Despite risks, using chemicals
 - Sign of a **good character**
 - Sign of **social responsibility**
- Consider: **ecological character** of lawn problems: if you eliminate plague it can move next door, so next door needs to apply same level of care
 - Disregard for lawn care: **free-riding** and **moral**
- Most **important driver** for lawn chemical use:
 - Sense there is a “neighborhood **norm**” (rule) of lawn management
- Decisions about lawn chemical use in terms of something that they **owed** to their **neighbors**
 - “I wouldn’t insult my neighbors by not keeping my house up”

The good citizen: moral responsibility

- Lawn chemical use as something they felt they had to do to meet the **expectations** of their neighbours
 - ...imperative to mow in time for the recent high school prom. Limousines came to the cul-de-sac to pick up several high school students, **pictures** were taken on front lawns, and everyone wanted their yards **to look** perfect
 - Suzanne: why she continued lawn chemical treatments even though her dog's paws were bleeding, she replied: I guess we didn't want the yard **to look** bad when everybody else's looked so nice . . . You try to make it **look** as nice as you can, without *offending other people*
- Reveals: ways in which **neighborhood forced** certain kinds of lawn management onto individuals

Disciplining

- In place: system of monitoring (when to “improve” lawn), which relies heavily on a notion of **the view of** his lawn by the neighbors
- When weeds grow prominent:
 - “I would feel really out of place. It’s not only how the yard looks to me, but **how it looks to the neighbors**. If it’s not in keeping with the neighborhood [then I’d have to spray more]”
 - “[in his mom’s neighbourhood] if you don’t cut twice a week you are a communist!”
 - “We get kind of irritated when people don’t do something with their yard. I get mad if people don’t put plants out to make their front yard look nice”

Lawn people: power shaping **subjects**

The argument (Robbins’):

- Maintenance of lawn yard landscapes through environmentally harmful lawn chemicals: **internalized** environmental practice...
- ...which is:
 - Rooted on **socially enforced** environmental aesthetic
 - That **associates** good citizenship with **environmentally harmful activities** (use of chemicals)

Lawn people: power **shaping** subjects

- Such behaviors **benefit** the corporate entities that produce, package, and market the goods and services that maintain such an aesthetic
 - But it cannot be said that these companies **forced** anyone, in any simple way, to act as they do
 - Rather, the exercise of **power** is enacted **internally**
 - Through **production** of a certain kind of “**subject**,” whose identity as a **good citizen** is **associated** with a set of specific **environmental activities**
- Q: Who is this subject?

- The subject: **Lawn People!**

Foucault: exercising power

- Power can be exercised in more **subtle** ways than outright oppression and coercion
- i.e. by establishing **normalised** and **'deviant'**: behaviours (homosexuality), processes (democracy is inefficient), actions (stealing = crime), persons (lepers=unhealthy), places (Africa is dangerous, e.g. disease, crime), etc.
- People integrate these as **personal principles** that guide their behaviour -> you no more need to punish or compensate
- In this way governments (or those 'in power') **discipline** behaviour, processes, actions, people, places, etc. **without coercion**

Foucault: disciplining subjects

- Central problem of modern govt.: “the **conduct of conduct** or else the power to act on the actions of others”
 - Modern governments develop **technologies of power** to achieve
- **Panopticon**: what is it?
 - Prisoner feels he’s been watched and has to behave at all times in case guard is watching (Sharpe, 2009)
 - By feeling he’s been watched all the time he **internalises the rule** of discipline (behave as he is required)
 - Guard doesn’t even need be



Presidio Modelo prison, Cuba (Source: Friman, 2005)



Question: What’s this??

What's the importance of this?

- Power imposed through the 'construction' of
 - **Subjects**, e.g. self-monitored prisoners; lawn managers or lawn people
 - The **meaning** of (what it means to be) a chemicals-intensive lawn manager (=subject): i.e. a responsible citizen
- Through **internalisation of rules** which then guide behaviour, so that you voluntarily do and don't do certain things **without external coercion**
- Discourse/ knowledge are key to power
 - For constructing **the meaning of** lawn care, sexuality, etc.

Class exercise

- Get into groups
- Discuss and write down one real-world application of governmentality and disciplining through internally-imposed rules
 - Does what the approach describe sound familiar?
 - Do you have any personal or known examples of this happening?
 - Related or unrelated to environmental management
- Present to the rest of the class

Governmentality term

Used in the bibliography to signify/ refer to:

- The “how” of governing (Jeffreys & Sigley, 2009)
 - Calculated means of directing how we behave and act
- Way in which governments try to produce citizens best suited to their ends and objectives (those of governments)
- Organised practices through which subjects are governed (Mayhew, 2004)
 - Mentalities, rationalities, techniques

Implications 1: the power of corporations

Driver behind/ why of governmentality of lawn:

- Desire and community obligation cannot be marketed as **commodities**
 - But as embodied in intensive lawn practices such desires can be bought and sold to provide an industrial source of revenue
- Lawn industry does this by projecting back to lawn people **images of communities** achieved through
 - Hard work
 - Right commercial products (chemicals for lawn maintenance)
- Capitalist **expansion** (inherent drive) of sphere of commodities: lawn or backyard of sub-urban houses

Implications 2: the power of nature

- Through lawn, companies exercise power over citizens
- But also, lawn itself, i.e. its material input requirements (materiality) shape what good citizenship involves
 - What it means to be a “good citizen” materially-speaking: e.g. release chemical X in urban environment
 - Behaviour: shapes city as a turfgrass monoculture
 - Turfgrass monoculture: thrives, dominates urban landscape
- Robbins argues that “turfgrass places demands on us”
 - The lawn (its materiality: e.g. material needs/requirements) *also* creates subjects (side-by-side with corporations): ACTIVE AGENT!
 - “lawn people” = a result of the requirements of turfgrass to thrive