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# *Constructing Trust*

## **Introduction**

Our previous research has lead to a definition of trust as a socially constructed orientation between two people that is premised upon the belief that the other will take one's perspective into account when decision-making and will not act in ways that violate the moral standards of the relationship. Trust does not exist outside of the real or imagined presence of the other, and as such, is inherently a social phenomenon. This chapter focuses upon the interactional process that moves one into either a close friendship or love relationship, namely a relationship routinely characterized by trust. Initial encounters followed by self-disclosures and perspective-taking lead to the orientation of trust in emergent behaviors. Embedded in a social and power structure, two people meet in time and engage in the interactional process of trust-making. The three framing constructs of this interactional orientation of trust, social structure, power and time, are the focus of the first part of this chapter. The second part of this chapter will provide a detailed description of the interactional dynamics of trust construction. Finally and in conclusion, we give a detailed description of the orientation of trust.

## **Social Structure**

A social structure is a patterned or habitual way of interacting that typifies interdependent status-roles. This approach poses social structures as social facts (see Durkheim, 1895/1964) that are external, constraining and coercive. We propose that certain roles have trust built into them; one acts toward a person in a certain way because one trusts them. In other words, trust is an expectation of occupants of particular roles because of normative demands connected to this status-role position in the social structure and the larger culture, a position that reflects the more structural basis of trust construction. Whereas Sztompka (1999) suggests that normative coherence creates a structurally conducive situation for trust to emerge by offering appropriate rewards and sanctions so that social life can thus proceed in a rather predictable and unproblematic fashion, we believe that trust itself is a normative expectation, especially of status-roles like that of mother and father. Joyua cites her

mother as the person she trusts the most. When asked why, she offers up, “Well, I mean she’s my mother.” This is an acknowledgment of the connection between status-position of mother and the norm of trust. After this acknowledgment, she proceeds to cite how that trust was constructed, “There has been so many things. Like all my money, she holds it for me. She does so much for me.”

One of the beauties and detriments of family relationships is that one cannot will away the status-role position, it exists apart from one’s own volition. What is its consequence for trust construction? One enters into the most structured of these relationships blindly, after all one takes on these status-roles at birth. Culture dictates that mothers and fathers should act in certain ways, ways that promote and reinforce the initial orientation toward trust that is a necessity due to dependency (see Erikson, 1963). These ideal-type roles found within the family have trust built into them so that it is not an active construction of individuals until later in life, especially after the role is brought to the forefront of consciousness upon violation. Muffy provides an example of the force of social structure at work in her relationship when she states:

I guess a good example of that would be my mom and my sister cause they constantly violate my trust and I just always trust them over and over again. I guess that’s because they’re family.

This research’s focus on the friendship and love relationship suggests a belief that trust in parents is significantly different from trust in friends and lovers; trust in the former is more of a given that is social structurally determined, and trust in the latter is more of a construction. To what extent are social structural forces at work in the status-position of friend and lover, role relationships created and voluntarily entered into by its occupants? Is trust, as found in friendships and love relationships, a construction of its occupants or just an expectation attached to the status-role position? It appears that all roles, even those of friend or lover, have some degree of social structural influence. Barbara provides an insight into social structural forces at work in voluntary relationships when commenting about her husband:

It just sort of went with the territory. You know, I just felt like we got married and it was just you know that I felt that I had to trust him. That he was my husband. You know I had to trust this person.

Likewise, Lynn discusses the implicit trust she had for her husband:

Not before that point. I was sick I didn’t really suspect it. I trusted him implicitly I just trusted him implicitly. I never imagined in my wildest dreams that this person who I loved so much would do what he did.

Underlying this next very active attempt at construction of a friendship is the idea of certain unspoken expectations of what friends should or should not do:

Jim: Well like my friend Doug. And I mean like I said I would trust him completely, but there was times. We had some rough times ...

Interviewer: Why don't you tell me about one of those rough times?

Jim: Well we use to go out a lot and a number of times he would get involved in fights or something in a bar and he'd expect me to back him up or get him out of there in one piece. And but never really asking me to do any of this just expecting me. I think that caused problems between me and him.

Interviewer: So tell me about one fight in a particular bar and what happened?

Jim: Well he got in an argument with some guys and like I said just expected me to help him out.

Interviewer: Did you or did you not in this particular incident?

Jim: Of course I helped him.

Interviewer: And so you helped him out and then?

Jim: And I was furious afterwards.

Interviewer: Ok and what did you say to him?

Jim: Well I just said you know you shouldn't be doing this kind of stuff and getting your friends involved. You know 'cause all of us could of got hurt, or arrested or whatever and I just felt that if I'm going to be putting my life on the line or wind up in jail or something that he ought to clue me in before all this took place.

Interviewer: And what did he say back to that?

Jim: He didn't really care. He had a bad temper and when he got angry I don't think he thought about that. I think he was crowded by his anger ...

Interviewer: Well, not exactly but just in the matter what would he say? You just had a fight?

Jim: Well he'd say something like I thought you were my friend and I figured you'd help me.

Even with clarifications, Jim and Doug lapsed into an endless repetition of behaviors and arguments based upon a differing conception of friendship and trust that could not be negotiated, even forcefully. As expectation formulates the basis of habitual action typified by social structure, the socially structured determinants of trust in the voluntary relationships of friend and lover become evident.

## Power

Power is the ability of a person to do what one wants regardless of what others want and, inversely, the ability of a person to get others to do what he/she wants, regardless if they want to do it or not. An apparently Weberian (1921/1968) notion of power finds itself as one of the framing constructs of trust. The central focus of this section is the connection between power equality/inequality and trust construction; in what ways do power issues influence the development of trust?

Ideally speaking, equality of power structures a relationship so that trust is a possibility. This dynamic, while it seems rather simplistic, is important in the formation of trust in relationships. As Felix states when comparing mistrust of his first wife with the trust he has for his second wife:

The thing that was really different, I don't know if I have to fault myself, it's like my first wife I kind of look down on her. Like I mentioned when I met her, she was in a bad situation and, you know, and I spoiled her right from the beginning. Where my second wife, I always thought of an equal or if not better than me. She's an electrical engineer, she had a good job, owns her own house. But even when our relationship started it was more on a 50/50 basis. You know, even though I like spoiling her and doing things for her I do let her contribute also to, you know, the household, which she does.

People often recognize the power dimension in their relationships and the importance it plays in their relationships, often referring to it as a "need." Karen provides one example:

Karen: She decided to break up with me and she met another woman. They went out on a date, and she came to my house afterwards and told me all about it. I thought that was really weird. I saw her in a different way when she talking about their date.

Interviewer: What was the different way?

Karen: That she was really messed up. And for once, she needed me. The date didn't go very well, because she's so weird. She's not a real kind of warm, friendly people-person, so the date was not very good. I knew that was going to happen cause she is miserable. She needed me. She wanted me to make her feel better.

Interviewer: And how did that make you feel about the relationship?

Karen: I was in the driver's seat for once and I liked it.

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Karen: Things changed that night; it was interesting for me. She wanted to stay the night and I told her no and I've never said that before. Anytime she wanted anything of me, I would give it to her, you know, make her dinner, or whatever. I said no; she had to leave. That was a big turning point at that time for me. I didn't call her for a few days. She ended up writing me a letter telling me that I had the most cheerful disposition of anyone she knew and she didn't deserve anyone like me. I said, yes. It was kind of a revelation.

Interviewer: What was the revelation?

Karen: That I was better than what she deserved at that point in time. I deserved better for me. We were not in the same place.

Karen's relationship with her significant other transformed itself when the power relationship changed. Karen identified herself as the needy one prior to the break-up and subsequently identified her ex as the needy one. This shifting power

relationship leads to the recognition that the two were “not in the same place”; that place, we assert, is their position in the power structure.

When power inequalities are great, a curious thing happens. First, those with more power in the relationship do not have to trust the other, for, as the term implies, they can do what they want, acting benevolently or maliciously. Art chooses to not use a discovery about his wife against her and hence falls into the benevolent category:

Interviewer: When you first heard and you were upset, how did you come to regain trust at that point?

Art: Actually I think I had a value in my own reaction to it. And my reaction was sort of a mixture of shock and anger and I felt as if maybe not cognitively but emotionally as if that was an excuse to potentially dissolve the relationship.

Interviewer: For you, you mean?

Art: Sure, if I needed that. And if I wanted it bad enough I could use that as a tool.

Art appears fully conscious of the power his knowledge has to influence the relationship and his partner.

Kevin, who also knows the power of trust, for a while chooses to use it in a malicious manner:

Interviewer: What's that mean? Players?

Kevin: Like we date women or have people that we can like mentally mess with their heads but we all play for different things. Like, I've been hurt, so I might play to hurt someone else's feelings. Some of my friends might play to get money. Some of them might play for sex. Some of them might play for whatever the case is.

Interviewer: What does playing mean?

Kevin: Playing means mentally messing with someone's head. In getting someone to believe in you, and watch you to the point where they're willing to give up whatever you want.

Interviewer: And you don't really care about them?

Kevin: You could care less. I mean you could care to a point, but you're just out to get what you want and that's it. But it's different from a dog. 'Cause a dog's just hit and run. It's just about sex. That's all a dog is about. A player is about getting things. And they don't hit and run. They stay with you. They're like, a dog, he'll have sex with you and he'll leave you. A player, he'll have sex with you and rob you at the same time and stay with you, and stay with you until you either (a) catch on or (b) gets all he can take. And then he leaves. So he doesn't like dump you right away, he stays with you. And he might not be the only person you're with. They have 10–15 other people.

Kevin's acknowledges his success at being a player is dependent upon his ability to get others, namely women, to trust him.



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