

Overview of Persuasion and Definitions

Rationale: This lesson orients students to persuasion and its relationship with other influence strategies.

By the end of this lesson, the student will be able to:

- Define persuasion
- Differentiate persuasion, compliance-gaining, propaganda, and manipulation
- Describe the six bases of power most commonly used in research today and recognize them within their own relationships.

{video}

No visual aid is used for this lesson.

Outline of the Lesson

- I. Review of previous session's content
- II. Lesson opening: Why should you care about learning about persuasion?
 - A. The study of persuasion is one of the oldest academic disciplines
 - The ancient Greeks studied rhetoric and considered it essential to a good democracy
 - B. But also, it's so darn useful!
 1. What percentage of people have to use persuasion in their jobs?
 - To get the job (during the interviewing process)
 - To get promoted / To get raises
 - To get clients/customers
 - To be liked
 - To get help when needed
 - To influence others to share their views
 2. Some ways I use persuasion
 - Building this program
 - Encouraging you to study
 - Parenting
 3. Why should YOU want to learn more about persuasion?
 - Instrumental function: You can get things done.
 - Knowledge and awareness function: When you understand persuasion, you can tailor your strategies to the situation AND make sure that what you're doing is ethical.
 - Defensive function: You are better able to defend yourself against persuasion.
 - Debunking function: You'll know the difference between what works and what the general public THINKS works but doesn't.
- III. Overview
 - A. The definition of persuasion
 - B. Contrasting persuasion with compliance-gaining, manipulation, and propaganda

- C. Typology of propaganda
- D. Choosing influence strategies
- E. Sources of power in human interaction

Body

I. The definition of persuasion

A. Essential features:

1. Presence of some goal the sender intends to achieve
2. Freedom on the part of the receiver to be influenced or not
3. Effects are achieved through communication
4. Involves some change in the mental state of the receiver (in other words, their attitude, values, or beliefs).
5. Must be successful

B. One definition of persuasion:

- A successful, intentional effort at influencing another person's mental state through communication in circumstances in which the receiver has some measure of freedom.

C. Persuasion influences behaviors through beliefs, attitudes, and values

A. Beliefs: our ideas about what things are true/false in the world

- There are more cats than dogs in the U.S.

B. Attitudes (opinions): how we feel about those facts.

- People are crazy for loving cats so much.

C. Values: our enduring notions of right and wrong.

- It is wrong to "own" an animal, even cats.

II. Contrasting persuasion with compliance-gaining, propaganda, and manipulation

A. Compliance-gaining is distinct from persuasion because it is focused on changing behavior only

- No interest in any change in attitudes, beliefs, or values
- Compliance-gaining can often be ethical

B. Propaganda is distinct from persuasion because it:

- Has a strong ideological bent
- Is institutional in nature (organizations, government, corporations)
- Typically uses mass media
- Tends to be a more ethically suspect method of influence (ends justify the means)

C. Manipulation is distinct from persuasion because it always involves deception

- Getting someone to do (or believe) as you wish through deception
- Ethics are compromised when deception is involved because deception removes some aspects of the receiver's free will. Receivers should have access to all the information they might consider important to make a good decision
- One can be good at persuasion without being manipulative.

III. Propaganda appeals fall into seven basic categories.

A. Plain folks appeal ("I'm one of you")

B. Testimonials

C. Bandwagon effect (everybody's doing it)

D. Card-stacking (telling only one side of the story)

E. Transfer of positive or negative associations

F. Glittering generalities (idealistic language, patriotism)

G. Name-calling (socialist, racist, tree-hugger, etc.)

IV. Choosing influence strategies

A. People tend to prefer using friendly strategies in general.

B. Primary dimensions: Our decisions about how to pursue an influence goal can be thought of as belonging to one of two primary dimensions:

1. **Efficiency**: What will work the best?

2. **Appropriateness**: What is socially acceptable?

C. Secondary dimensions (other considerations we take into account) include:

1. **Identity goals**: our moral standards for who we want to be

2. **Interaction goals**: creating and maintaining a good impression

3. **Resource goals**: maintaining important relationships and increasing personal rewards

4. **Arousal goals**: wanting not to get too nervous, overwhelmed, or stressed out- either by going through with the influence attempt or by not doing anything about getting what we want

D. Our choices also depend on our knowledge of the other person

1. We are more likely to use threats or other harsh strategies with strangers we don't have to see again.

2. We use a wider variety of strategies with strangers than intimates (trial and error).

V. Sources of power in human interaction. "Bases of Power" (French & Raven, 1959)

A. **Reward power** comes from the ability to dispense someone if they do what you want (or not reward them if they don't).

B. **Coercive power** comes from the ability to use force (physical, social, emotional, political, or economic) to make people do what you want.

C. **Legitimate power** comes from society's acceptance that people in certain social positions (being "the boss") are supposed to be "in charge."

- The use of the word "Legitimate" here indicates that the power relationship is a result of the generally accepted rules of the culture associated with the roles that the participants are viewed as occupying.

D. **Expert power** comes from the value the receiver places on the source's education (PhD, MD, etc.) or their (generally relevant) experiences with a subject.

E. **Referent power** comes from the receiver's liking or admiration for the source. Movie stars and celebrities have this power, but so do ordinary people who are very popular.

F. **Informational power** (added by Raven in 1965) comes as a result of possessing information that others need or want.

G. *Note: Americans especially have a bias toward stating that there is equal power in relationships, but that is rarely if ever the case. It is relatively rare for American close personal relationships to be completely one-sided, but that doesn't mean there is no difference in power, both in the moment and overall. Often it helps to think about how power can flow and shift within a relationship depending on specific situations and contexts.*

Conclusion

- I. Review
 - A. The definition of persuasion
 - B. Contrasting persuasion with compliance-gaining, manipulation, and propaganda
 - C. Typology of propaganda
 - D. Choosing influence strategies
 - E. Sources of power in human interaction
- II. Learning activity
- III. Lesson closing

References

- French, J. R. P., Jr., & Raven, B. (1959). The bases of social power. In D. Cartwright (Ed.), *Studies in social power*, (pp. 150–167). University of Michigan
- Raven, B. H. (1965). Social influence and power. In I.D. Steiner & M. Fishbein (Eds.), *Current studies in social psychology* (pp. 371–382). Holt, Rinehart, Winston.

Learning Activity

Complete one of these two class activity options.

In the Classroom

1. Divide into small groups
2. Describe a time when you had more power in a friendship than the other person.
 - What type of power was this? Why did you have it?
3. Describe a time when you had less power in a friendship than the other person.
 - What type of power was this? Why did you have it?
4. Share the results of your discussion with the class

Remote

1. Download this document: [L01-overview-of-persuasion-and-definitions-activity.docx](#)
2. Watch the activity walk-through in the lesson video
3. Record your relationships and the power dynamics in the document
4. Submit the completed activity document to this assignment

Variations and Accommodations

Follow guidance from local accommodation authorities. Please contact your instructor if any accommodations are necessary.