

Actor Analysis I: Individuals, Psychology & Narratives



differentiating forms of actor analysis

- almost all debates should have actor analysis because almost all motions require you to **identify an actor**
 - typically the actors debates ask you to engage with come at three rough scales: **states** (IR), **social movements/communities** (social justice and fluffy narrative), and **individuals** (everything else)
 - sometimes it's a mixture of the three (e.g. when a government engages with its people in domestic policy)
- note that all types of actor analysis require you to identify two things: **incentives** and **capacities** to act
 - but different types of actors are very different in 1) how they understand and construct their incentives, 2) their decision-making process (i.e. how they think about making decisions)





individual actor analysis

- people tend to be quite bad at individual actor analysis – they often skip the bulk of it because they see it as intuitive or because they have a hang-up about ‘needing to sound smart’
 - typically individual actor analysis requires someone to understand how someone might feel or think. This doesn’t require jargon or complicated spec knowledge– it just requires you to deeply characterise someone’s identity and hence, how they likely to respond to something

how people understand their own incentives

- why are some men sexist even though they know and respect many women in their lives? Why do many new immigrants socialise with people from their home country and speak their native language rather than attempting to assimilate? Why do some gay people choose to never 'act' on their homosexuality in order to stay in a faith that says being LGBTQ+ is sinful?
 - all of these questions hit at the heart of actor analysis and decision-making. **Decisions that seem irrational are coloured by past experiences, personal beliefs/convictions etc., making them completely intuitive to a person**



what are incentives shaped by?

- **past experiences** (or lack thereof)
 - controls how they understand situations (e.g. whether they can critically assess it, whether specific actions they take are likely to result in success etc.)
 - affects what they perceive as foreign and familiar
- **socialised beliefs and opinions** (e.g. beliefs held by their community and family)
 - influences how they weigh different priorities in their life
 - e.g. Side B Christians may prioritise faith over expressing their sexuality
- **who they perceive to be in their in-group and in the out-group**
 - controls who they prioritise protecting more, and who can influence them to a greater degree





what is decision-making shaped by?

- **limited amount of time and bandwidth**
 - defaulting to easy heuristics (i.e. shortcuts)
- behaviour that is **valued within a community or taught**
 - people may feel pressured into a certain behaviour because that behaviour is one that allows the continued access to a community
 - or, because they grown within a specific community, they do not know any other possible actions they can take
 - e.g. men who grow up in culture of toxic masculinity may react aggressively to feelings they do not understand. Their culture rewards aggressiveness, and does not teach any alternative actions (e.g. reconciliation, introspection, communication etc.)
- other **external limitations**
 - resources, the fear of backlash etc.
 - many of these external limitations are more relevant to some communities over others. It's important to characterise them in context of the actor

note irrationality does not mean randomness!

- any debaters (especially novices) believe that when people are **irrational**, it is equivalent to being **random**
 - this is not true. Irrational behaviour means that people often take actions that are perceived by others to be against their own self-interest but in the shoes of the actor, taking into account their life experiences and limitations on their behaviour, their actions perfectly make sense
- be careful not to skip lines of logic and gloss it over with, “X actor is irrational”



example: THBT ethnic communities should not shame their members for being 'white-washed'

- **Gov:** Those who are perceived to be white-washed are deeply hurt by this kind of shaming and will turn away from ethnic minority communities, taking away lifelines of support while draining the communities of potentially valuable membership/resources.
 - **incentive:** When minorities live in a white world they feel excluded by, what many desire the most is a community where they do not feel like an outsider (where they are accepted).
 - so when you, as an ethnic community, cast these people out, they suffer from a double exclusion. In fact, the rejection of the ethnic community is likely to hurt more.
 - **decision-making process:** When faced with extreme hurt, individuals often turn away from the source of pain.
 - this is especially true in this case, where many white-washed people have no capacity to change their behaviour (e.g. they cannot immediately speak non-English languages fluently)



example: THO the normalisation of female fantasies that center around gendered power imbalances (e.g. 50 Shades of Grey)

- **opp:** Women can tell the differences between fantasy and reality. Indulging in fantasy is often a necessary way that women reclaim control over their sexual desires. To stigmatise it would be to shame women for the fantasies patriarchy has imparted on them
 - **why can women tell fantasy and reality?**
 - **past experiences:** Women live with the harms of patriarchy every day. They, of all people, understand the harms of gendered power imbalances
 - **why do women enjoy 50 Shades of Grey**
 - **socialised beliefs and opinions:** Living under patriarchy means that the experiences of sexual desire can be gendered. Many women may enjoy being dominated. However, they can only fully enjoy this fantasy when it is under their control (e.g. in a book that they can open and shut, sharing it with friends that also share their experiences)

