

POWER AND MANIPULATION DEPICTED BY MILES BRON IN GLASS ONION (2022)

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ABSTRACT

This study is aimed to uncover the types of power and investigate how far power can lead to manipulate others in a movie entitled *Glass Onion (2022)*, written and directed by Rian Johnson. The director portrays Miles Bron's exercise of power as if he had invited his friends to play a murder mystery game on his private island in Greece, yet Blanc solves it promptly. Miles is giving his friends a genuine opportunity to kill him since he is disgruntled; in fact, Duke died of a poisoned drink in moments. Due to the disruption caused by Miles' murder mystery game, this study focuses on studying the power wielded by the main character, Miles Bron. The researchers employed qualitative approach by using content analysis method to analyze the movie. Therefore, the data will be displayed in the form of word, phrase, sentence, and utterance produced by all movie's characters. The findings suggest that Miles has used four types of power bases to control his friends; reward power, coercive power, referent power, and legitimate power. Furthermore, Miles was able to control his friends by disrupting their psychological awareness in chaotic situations such as the disappearance of Duke's gun and cellphone to manipulate the situation as well as the reason of Duke's death.

Keywords: power; manipulation; main character; Miles Bron; *Glass Onion* movie

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengungkap jenis-jenis kekuasaan dan menyelidiki seberapa jauh kekuasaan dapat memanipulasi orang lain dalam film berjudul *Glass Onion (2022)* yang ditulis dan disutradarai oleh Rian Johnson. Sutradara menggambarkan penggunaan kekuasaan Miles Bron mengundang teman-temannya untuk memainkan permainan misteri pembunuhan di pulau pribadinya di Yunani, namun Blanc dapat menyelesaikannya dengan cepat. Miles memberi kesempatan kepada teman-temannya untuk membunuhnya karena dia merasa tidak puas; yang terjadi justru Duke meninggal karena minuman beracun dalam beberapa saat. Karena awal mula kekacauan disebabkan oleh permainan misteri pembunuhan Miles, penelitian ini berfokus menganalisis kekuasaan yang dimiliki oleh tokoh utama, Miles Bron. Para peneliti menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode analisis konten untuk menganalisis film tersebut. Oleh karena itu, data akan ditampilkan dalam bentuk kata, frase, kalimat, dan ucapan yang dilontarkan oleh seluruh tokoh dalam film. Hasil dari penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa Miles telah menggunakan empat jenis basis kekuasaan untuk mengendalikan teman-temannya; kekuasaan penghargaan, kekuasaan paksaan, kekuasaan panutan, dan kekuasaan legitimasi. Selain itu, Miles mampu mengendalikan teman-temannya dengan mengganggu kesadaran psikologis mereka dalam situasi kacau seperti hilangnya senjata dan ponsel Duke untuk memanipulasi situasi serta alasan kematian Duke.

Kata Kunci: kekuasaan; manipulasi; tokoh utama; Miles Bron; film *Glass Onion*

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INTRODUCTION

In today's society, power dynamics are extensive, complex, and frequently concealed (French et al., 1959). One specific impact of social power variety is the difference in processes of social influence from the speaker and psychological change in the listener. The concept "psychological change" refers to any change in a person's behavior, opinions, attitudes, objectives, needs, values, or any other part of their psychological field. Meanwhile, social influence is a power that influences a person (P), which is produced by a social agent (O), which might be a group, a party, a role, a norm, or a part of a group. In this case, French et al. (1959) stated that the measurement of how much social power existed is comprised of P's capacity to manage the social influence that he receives as well as whether or not he would accept the information based on the psychological change.

When it comes to social power, there will be those who try to use their position to manipulate others. Manipulation must be defined as a negative action that is distinct from the production of incorrect information. It was done intentionally to serve only one side. Manipulation occurs as a result of a huge quantity of social power that can control a person. This paper will analyze the usage of power bases based on French et al. (1959) theory, which will categorize five types: reward power, coercive power, referent power, expert power, and legitimate power. According to Vadai (2016), manipulation can be classified into three types: expressive, representational, and commissive.

Previously, some studies investigated into the nature and dynamics of social power in a variety of domains. For instance, the use of a movie in examining power and dominance, power and impoliteness, power and leadership, and comparing power in two movies (Manzaila, 2013), (Ratri et al., 2019), (Lunenburg, 2012), (Siahaan, 2021). As a result, the objective of this research is to uncover the usage of power bases and evaluate how far manipulation was used by the main

character in the Glass Onion film (2022). The movie was chosen because the scriptwriter and director, Rian Johnson, is huge fans of Agatha Christie's work, and he adapted the same genre of mystery, detective, and comedy to make this film highly popular in 2022. Furthermore, the main character, Miles Bron, is appropriate for filling the party since he has a great power to influence his friends and also utilizes his power to manipulate others.

In accordance with the purpose of the study, this paper formulates two research questions: (1) What forms of Miles' utterances or actions that indicated five kinds of power? (2) To what extent is Miles' power used to manipulate other characters? By examining the main character of the film using the research question posed above, it is expected that the result of this study would be beneficial to those interested in comparable subjects, such as how power and manipulation are used in various literary works or situations. Furthermore, ideally, this study will contribute to the reader's and the next researcher's insight and knowledge.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Five Power Bases

Power has been defined in various disciplines. In social psychology, power is defined as an individual's or group's ability to influence or control the behavior, attitudes, and beliefs of others in a social context (Pratto et al., 2007). Kovach (2020) conducted one of the most recent studies on power and defined power as the ability to shape the outcomes of a social interaction in ways that favor one's own goals, interests, or values. This definition encompasses the idea of social influence, as well as the significance of personal objectives and values in the exercise of power. In summary, power is the potential influence that one has over another person or group, and in most cases, the person with power has control over something that the other person (or group) wants.

Accordingly, the ability of an individual/ a group to influence others to carry

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out an activity is measured by the strength of power. One of the most commonly cited definitions of power comes from social psychologist French & Raven (1959), who identified five different bases of power, these are: (a) reward power, the ability to recompense another for conformity; (b) coercive power, the authority to convict others for noncompliance; (c) legitimate power, this develops from the assumption that an individual/ a group has the formal right to make demands and expect others to comply and obey; (d) referent power, power that comes from being liked, admired, or respected by others; (e) expert power, this is based on outstanding skill and expertise in a particular area.

Manipulation

Manipulation refers to surreptitiously sent information; it would be self-defeating if the target recognized the speaker's purpose and came to a particular conclusion. So, manipulation is always done on purpose; as Buller et al., (1993) mentioned, "unintentionally misleading statements are frequently regarded as errors, gaffes, and the like," yet they are not manipulation. Blass (2005) added the equivocation used during manipulation is similar to lies, exaggeration, and half-truths. Thus, how manipulation work is not directly about convincing the target of a lie, however it is about controlling the beliefs that the target may accept and react on. Therefore, manipulation could be blocking one's rational device so that the manipulator himself can perform specific operations on beliefs (Saussure, 2005).

Manipulation, according to Vadai (2016), can be traced pragmatically through expressive, representative, and commissive speech acts. The speaker's attitude or emotions towards an idea can be perceived as expressive. The positive was claimed by the speaker by alluding to self-presentation, while the negativity was used to legitimize other-presentation. Moreover, the representative was portrayed by lying, blurring, and defocusing. Furthermore, hearers may be manipulated by the act of commissive speech act since they

typically do not process the essential information to determine the value of the speaker's promises or threats.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative content analysis method applied in audio-visual texts. The content analysis method has been widely used to define what is said, written, or recorded (White et al., 2006). In accordance to the study conducted by Parveen et al. (2017), content analysis can be used to examine written texts, oral texts, iconic texts, audio-visual texts, and hypertexts, therefore, movie can be used as the object of this research. *Glass Onion* (2022) movie was chosen since the main character, Miles Bron, exerts his power to manipulate his friends. As power bases theory French et al. (1959) states that power represents the ability to influence others, therefore, this study attempts to reveal what types of power that Miles employed and how far his power may be used to manipulate other characters.

The primary source of data for this study is the *Glass Onion* dialogue transcript (2022). Since the descriptive qualitative method was used, the data are in the form of linguistic units such as words, phrases, clauses, or sentences. Furthermore, the data for this study are the utterances made by the characters in the movie's conversations that demonstrate Miles Bron's use of power. Observation and documentation were used as tools. The following five stages of data analysis were followed:

1. Watching the whole movie to get a thorough understanding of the plot.
2. Note taking characters conversations that may suggest the use of power by Miles Bron while watching the movie.
3. Note taking the use of manipulation by Miles Bron.
4. Identifying and classifying the type of power bases and manipulation using observation checklist.
5. Cross-checking the raw data from the subtitle using Aegisub application

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while rewatching the movie in order to obtain credible data.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Power in Miles' Utterances

This section explored the types of power bases employed by the main character of Glass Onion movie, Miles Bron. There were four sorts of power bases discovered: reward power, coercive power, legitimate power, and referent power. Since most of the statements were not directly spoken by Miles, each category will present one scene or case that will be thoroughly examined. Miles Bron's power bases were explored below.

Reward Power: Giving shares to Birdie

Dialogue 1 (1:38:34.66 – 1:38:46.50)

PEG: Birdie, please tell me you did not think sweatshops are where they make... sweatpants. Oh my God.

BIRDIE: [sighs] Miles is going to pay me off. He said if I take full responsibility for the sweatshops, he'll pay me the value of my shares. Thirty million. I will do whatever I have to do to save myself, and he is my only lifeline.

The first set of data comes from Birdie and Peg's talks. It can be excerpt from the scene that Peg, Birdie's manager, is concerned about Birdie's decision. The statement above does not directly mention Miles; rather, Birdie reiterates that Miles agreed to pay her thirty million dollars, as seen in the figure below.

Figure 1. Birdie's talks (source: Glass Onion, 2022)



Figure 1. above was captured in a minute (1:38:34.66) in accordance with the conversation, indicating that Birdie retells what Miles would provide her as a reward. Miles employs his abilities to make a reward promise, and he is able to manage the possibility that Birdie will receive it (French & et al., 1959). However, this was not a 'pure reward' for Birdie's accomplishment, but instead there is a mutualism between the two as Birdie needs someone to be her lifeline as well as Miles needs someone to manage his mess.

Coercive Power: Threats to Lionel, Claire, and Birdie

Dialogue 2 (0:51:26.00 – 0:51:55.45)

BLANC: So, you play hardball with Lionel, threaten to destroy his reputation if he does not play along and power a manned rocket with Klear.

BLANC: But now with Claire too.. Now perhaps, you threaten to support her opponent in the up-and-coming election if she does not approve your power plant.

MILES: You have done some homework.

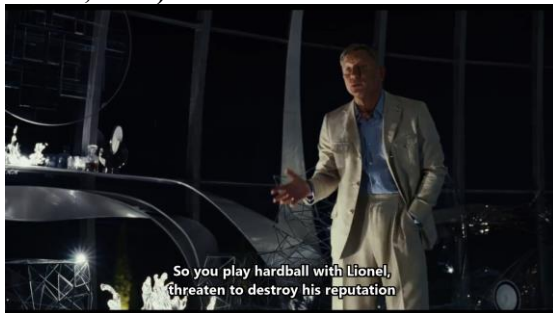
BLANC: And Birdie. Bangladesh. Sweetie Pants are manufactured there in a sweatshop. You're making Birdie take the fall to cover your ass as the main investor.

Dialogue 2 took place after Blanc, as a detective, solved the murder mystery game in about 3 minutes. When Miles became enraged because what he prepared for the game is worthless, he discovered the truth about Miles' motive for bringing seven people to his remote island. In short, Blanc disclosed that Miles assembled them to a remote island since each of them has a real-life reason to wish him harm, as depicted in the image below.

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Figure 2. Blanc's talks (source: Glass Onion, 2022)



Blanc's speech demonstrates coercive power as he revealed what Miles did to Lionel, Claire, and Birdie if they did not come to his mission. Miles' use of power here is consistent with the study of Bailo (2017) on the advantages and disadvantages of using coercive power to influence people. Lionel, Claire, and Birdie would act rapidly to ensure complete cooperation while avoiding Miles's anxiety and resentment. As a result, the implications of coercive power here are based on a great deal of pressure and fear (Idrus, 2020).

Referent Power: Miles becomes the sponsor of his friends "The Disruptors"

Dialogue 3 (0:35:10.91 - 0:35:49.87)

HELEN: Oh, Lionel. Everybody knows who Lionel works for. And we know who bankrolled Claire's campaign.

HELEN: But when nobody... Nobody would touch Birdie with a ten-foot pole because she went on and compared herself to Harriet Tubman...who do you think showed up as an angel investor in Sweetie Pants? Huh?

HELEN: And Duke. When Duke got banned from Twitch for hawking rhino-horn boner pills to teenage boys... who set him up at YouTube and used their media empire to promote the stream?

Helen is dressed as Andy in the dialogue above, but no one recognizes her as the twin. When all of the invited people had gathered, Helen revealed Miles' intention to damage each of them. Upon seeing the condition, they recognized that the 'reward' they received was not a pure reward at all, as shown in the image below.

Figure 3. Helen's talks (source: Glass Onion, 2022)



It is slightly different from Dialogue 2, which presented the threat to Lionel, Claire, and Birdie; in Dialogue 3, Helen tried to convey what Miles did to make another person feel obligated and responsible for his/ her own field, since Helen is inquisitive about Miles' tactics. Furthermore, Miles was known as the co-founder of his company, Alpha, and was able to provide both strong encouragement and financial support. It is consistent with Issac et al. (2022) findings showing a person who reports great referent power is likely to consider himself as influential among his colleagues.

Legitimate Power: The invitation from Miles

Dialogue 4 (0:09:35.00 - 0:09:56.75)

CLAIRE: "My dear friends, my beautiful disruptors, my closest inner circle..."

LIONEL: "...we could use a moment of normalcy. And so, you are cordially invited..."

BIRDIE: "...for a long weekend on my private island..."

DUKE: "...where we will celebrate the bonds that connect us, and I hope your puzzle-solving skills are whetted."

LIONEL: "Because you will also be competing to solve the mystery..."

CLAIRE: "...of my murder. Travel details to come. Please forward any dietary restrictions. Love and all my kisses, Miles."

The dialogue above is the text of Miles' invitation card (see Figure 4). This involves the opening sequence of the movie, which introduces each character and characterization. Despite the fact that seven persons attended the invitation, Miles only

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sent four invitation boxes to 'The Disruptors'. Blanc accepted the invitation in order to complete his mission with Helen; Whiskey is joined by his boyfriend, Duke; and Peg is Birdie's manager.

Figure 4. Invitation card (source: Glass Onion, 2022)



Miles has control and employs legitimate power in the invitation since all of the receivers must have a complicated relationship with him. Despite the fact that Miles refers to them as "my beloved friend, my beautiful disruptors, my closest inner circle," which has the typical literal meaning, however, those words have the power to force the receivers into attending the invitation. As Sorm et al. (2018) remarked, legitimate power, one of which is acquired by position, and Miles has a greater status in that circle or small organization as a job title (sponsorship/investor). As a result, Miles' actions remained legal, besides the invitation's informal instruction.

Manipulation Strategy

Miles Bron uses his power to manipulate his companions by controlling their rationality in the face of difficulty. Manipulation can be seen pragmatically through three sorts of speech acts: expressive, representative, and commissive, which will be described in the subsequent paragraph.

Expressive: Manipulating Duke's death

Dialogue 5 (1:50:06.50 – 1:50:42.87)

MILES: Duke took my glass!
 BLANC: That's what you told us he did. He must've picked it up by mistake, you told us, right after it happened.

BLANC: And after you said those words, that's what we all remember seeing, but think! Ignore his lies, everyone, and think clearly now. What did we all actually see?

BLANC: You handed Duke your own glass. Clear as crystal. Right in front of our eyes.

Based on the dialogue above, the earlier incident in which Duke died from a poisoned drink was explicitly mentioned. Miles said that Duke took his glass by accident when Miles distracted Duke by pointing at Birdie, who was spinning in her dress. According to Siahaan (2021), one of the features of manipulation is the use of tactics, which Miles used to convince others about what truly happened. Furthermore, the pointing out of negative action by other parties was discovered in Miles' utterance, leading to the conclusion that Duke was dead because he took Miles' glass (Vadai, 2016).

Representative: Stealing the intellectual ownership of the company's founding idea

Dialogue 6 (0:52:19.20 – 0:52:41.75)

BLANC: Oh, this is the famous napkin! I know this story.

MILES: Right... Will you look at that? I sketched out the original idea for Alpha on a cocktail napkin and I showed it to Andi one night at the Glass Onion.

MILES: That was our local bar. That's where it all began. But they tore it down the year after that.

BLANC: Mm-hmm.

What Miles expressed in Dialogue 6 is completely a lie after going to such lengths to beat Andy at trial and threaten his friends to give false confessions. Miles regards Blanc as someone from outside his group, therefore he believes it will be simpler for him to speak lies and distort the facts (see Figure 5). What Miles asserted about intellectual ownership of Alpha's founding idea was portrayed as a winner strategy, which makes what happens seem to be his own, as it is in accordance with studies conducted (Madsen, 2003).

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Figure 5. Stealing company's idea (source: Glass Onion, 2022)



Commissive: Burning the napkin

Dialogue 7 (1:57:04.00 – 1:57:54.04)

HELEN: You recognize this? Andi's handwriting. I got you, son of a bitch.
 MILES: Oh, let's slow down there, sister. Okay? Because first, how could you ever prove that that's the original? She might have copied mine.
 HELEN: No. The bar closed nine years ago, and hers has one thing that yours just doesn't.
 MILES: Okay, but second... [thuds]
 BLANC: What the hell did he do?
 HELEN: He just burned it!
 MILES: Burned what? I didn't see anything.
 HELEN: You burned it!
 MILES: Is someone making toast?

The last type of manipulation is the commissive one. Based on the dialogue above, after Helen succeeded to disclose Miles' lies about the intellectual ownership of the company's founding idea (Alpha), Miles still maintained his manipulative tactic to distract Helen's mind. By utilizing the source of Klear in his house, Miles was able to easily burn the napkin remotely. In accordance with the study employed by Vadai (2016), Helen, as the hearer, slipped out of her consciousness while Miles said 'Okay, but second...'. Helen might give Miles a word for explaining what he did to her sister, however, Helen was unaware of the situation and the threat she would get.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Conclusion

The objective of this study is to uncover Miles Bron's use of power bases and

to examine how far Miles gets to manipulate others. As a result, there are several results that depict Miles' power bases. To commence, the film features a total of eight characters who actively contribute to the story's storyline. According to the research of French et al. (1959), four of the five power bases discovered in this movie are mostly reiterated by other characters. Miles, as the person who holds the greatest power in the community, has the ability to disrupt his friends' logical minds in order to disrupt the situation. The accompanying table provides additional classification of Miles' power bases and manipulation tactics.

Table 1. Miles' power and manipulation

Types	Scene
Reward	Giving an iPad for the winner of murder mystery game Giving shares to Birdie
Coercive	Threatening Birdie to take responsibility for his mess Threatening to Lionel, Claire, and Birdie
Referent	Becoming sponsor of his friends "The Disruptors"
Legitimate	The invitation from Miles Utilizing his position to ensure Andy's death Using his position to dump his mess on Birdie
Expressive	Conveying about someone wants to kill him Manipulating Duke's death
Representative	The loss of Duke's cellphone and gun Stealing the intellectual ownership of the company's founding idea
Commissive	Manipulating Andy's death Burning the napkin

The findings of the research demonstrate a phenomenon of the implication of power bases in movie dialogue. To commence, power bases could be examined using words or speech, as in manipulation, which is inextricably connected to the study of

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speech acts. Speech acts theory, from a pragmatic perspective, intends to investigate the meaning of speech in order to comprehend the meaning expressed by the speaker (Puji Hariati et al., 2020). As a consequence, Vadai (2016) expanded on French et al. (1959) study of power bases and provided a link between the use of power and manipulation. The findings support the study of power and dominance by Manzaila (2013), in which the person with the most power dominates and may be the group's representative. Meanwhile, this research reveals that not everyone who exerts great power over others is a skilled or knowledgeable expert in any field. As a result, neither Miles' utterance nor the dialogue of the other characters revealed any expert power.

Suggestions

This research was constrained by the fact that it solely focused on power bases theory and manipulation strategy from a pragmatic perspective. For the future, researchers may attempt to study manipulation in various fields of linguistics, such as semantics. In addition, future study could use data other than movie clips, such as interview utterances, talk show dialogue, and so on.

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