

how it functions to oppress people. The intent in these courses is to discredit sexism or racism by deconstructing their ideological and historical bases. But discrediting isn't Smith's specific intent either.

Smith argues that in both these cases, abstractions and ideological deconstruction, the critique by itself isn't enough; it doesn't tell the actual story. Theory in both forms plays itself out in the everyday, actual world of people, and that is Smith's concern. Insofar as theory and ideology mean anything, they mean something in everyday life, whether that life is the researcher's or that of ordinary women. Smith is interested in where the rubber meets the road. In this case, the "rubber" is made up of theoretical abstractions and ideological knowledge that governs, and the "road" is the actual experiences of women. Thus, Smith isn't interested in doing away with abstractions *per se*, nor is she simply interested in exposing the relations of ruling. Doing so is not enough, and it runs the risk of replicating the problem, as we will soon see.

### The New Materialism

As we've seen in other chapters, Marx's materialism argues that there is a relationship between one's material class interests and the knowledge one has. Smith proposes a *new materialism*, one where facts and texts rather than commodification produce alienation and objectification. With Marx, commodities and money mediate the relationships people have with themselves and others. That is, we relate and come to understand our self and others through money and products. Marx's theory was specific to industrialized capitalism—the economies of more technologically advanced societies may be different. Some of the important changes include shifts from manufacturing to "service" economies; increases in the use of credentials and in the amount and use of expert knowledge; advances in communication and transportation technologies; exponential increases in the use of advertising images and texts, and so on. In such economies, relationships and power are mediated more through texts and "facts" than commodities and money. Further, just as people misrecognized the reality in back of money and commodities, so today most people misrecognize the relations of power in back of texts and facts.

In Marx's materialism, "relations between people are mediated by (and appear as) relations between commodities and money" (Smith, 1990, p. 68), and in Smith's new materialism, "relations between individual knowers appear as facts and are mediated by relations between facts" (p. 68). Texts and the facticity that text produces are the primary medium through which power is exercised in a society such as the United States.

### Texts and Facts

Though the idea of text is gaining usage and popularity, it, like culture, is one of the more difficult words to define. Winfried Noth (1985/1995) in his *Handbook of Semiotics* says that given that textuality is defined by the researcher, "It is not surprising that semioticians of the text have been unable to agree on a definition and on

criteria of their object of research" (p. 331). Smith, however, gives us a broad, clear, and useful definition of text that includes three elements: the actual written words and symbols, the physical medium through which words and symbols are expressed, and the materiality of the text—the actual practices of writing and reading.

Smith is specifically concerned with texts that are officially or organizationally written and read. She gives us the example of two different texts that came out of an incident in 1968 involving police and street people in Berkeley, California. One text came in the form of a letter to an underground newspaper and was written by someone who was marginally involved in the altercation. His text was "written from the standpoint of an actual experience" (D. E. Smith, 1990, p. 63) and contained specific references to people, places, times, and events. It was embedded in and expressed actual life experiences as they happened. This was a personal account of a personal experience that reflexively situated the writer in the event.

The other text was the official incident report that came from the mayor's office. The standpoint of this second text was organizational. Rather than an account of a personal experience, it was written from the point of view of anonymous police officers who are portrayed as trained professionals and organizational representatives. In addition, the official report embedded the text within "sequences of organizational action extending before and after them" (D. E. Smith, 1990, p. 64) using reports from police, courts, and probation officers. In other words, the official text brought in many elements that existed outside of the actual situation and experience. In the end, every element of the actual experience was given meaning through these extra-local concepts rather than the experience itself.

The obliteration of the historical and specific sources is part of the process of creating facts (D. E. Smith, 1990, p. 66). The facticity of a statement is thus not a property of the statement itself. A statement simply proposes a state of affairs like "the earth is flat." For a statement to become fact, there must be a corresponding set of practices that provide its plausibility base, a group of people, beliefs, and practices that give substance to the statement. *Facticity*, then, "is essentially a property of an institutional order mediated by texts" (p. 79). Facts and texts are organizational achievements, not independent truths of the world. These, then, are the texts and facts in which Smith is interested: the ones that are written and read as part of organizational method and relations of power. They create an objective reality whose existence is dependent upon specific institutionalized practices.

### Concepts and Theory: Lived Experience and Knowing

Smith argues that the distinction between abstract knowledge (or text) and lived experience holds for all people, whether male, female, black, white, Hispanic, or anyone else. However, women's experience and knowledge are specifically important. Generally speaking, there are a few reasons why this would be accurate. First, knowledge of the oppressed is in some ways truer than that of the ruling. The ruling generally "believe their own press." For example, members of the ruling class generally believe the capitalist ideology that hard work results in upward social mobility.