

for themselves (see, for instance, "Suggested further reading" at the end of this chapter).

Ideology and gender

"Ideology" is often misunderstood as signifying a system of belief that is outmoded, clumsy, or different from or opposed to one's own set of beliefs. So, whereas one's own belief system appears self-evident, natural, and "correct," in the sense that all right-thinking people would "of course" agree, the belief system of another person (especially someone of a different background, race or ethnicity, religion, or political affiliation) seems wrong-headed, out of touch with reality, deluded, and/or perverse. However, the theorization of ideology argues not only that the ideology and the structure of *any* society or group are closely connected, but also that *it is impossible to escape ideology*. The very ways we observe and understand, think and talk are not only ideologically saturated but also themselves articulate and circulate ideology.

Catherine Belsey, for example, observes that

ideology is both a real and an imaginary relation to the world – real in that it is the way in which people really live their relationship to the social relations which govern their conditions of existence, but imaginary in that it discourages a full understanding of these conditions of existence and the ways in which people are socially constituted within them. It is not, therefore, to be thought of as a system of ideas in people's heads, nor as the expression of a higher level of real material relationships, but as the necessary condition of action within the social formation.

(Belsey, 1986: 46)

Put otherwise, ideology develops out of the reality of people's relation to the social: to social classes, their dynamics and relationship to one another; structures of employment and labor; patterns of social interaction; and so on. However, at the same time, ideology overlays and masks that relation so that contradictions, inconsistencies, and inequities are smoothed over and naturalized: "Ideology obscures the real conditions of existence by presenting partial truths. It is a set of omissions, gaps rather than lies, smoothing over contradictions, appearing to provide answers to questions which in reality it evades, and masquerading as coherence ..." (Belsey, 1986: 46). Thus, the existence of the members of a society is constituted by the structure of the society and the conditions of existence permitted by that structure, but is framed by "a system of representations (discourses, images, myths) concerning the real relations in which people live" (Belsey, 1986: 46).

However, Belsey warns:

It is important to stress ... that ideology is in no sense a set of deliberate distortions foisted upon a helpless working-class by a corrupt and cynical

bourgeoisie (or upon victimized women by violent and power hungry men). If there are groups of sinister men in shirt-sleeves purveying illusions to the public these are not the real makers of ideology. Ideology has no creators in that sense, since it exists necessarily.

(Belsey, 1986: 46)

Ideology, then, emerges out of social structure and the relations of people to that structure, but it *disguises* those relations in order to ensure its own smooth operation. It becomes naturalized, and in turn naturalizes for us our conditions of social existence. It "exists in commonplaces and truisms as well as in philosophical and religious systems. It is apparent in all that is 'obvious' to us," so that the way things appear to be are understood as the way things simply *are*, and have always been (Belsey, 1986: 46).

One powerful agent of ideology is advertising. It ensures continuing sales and thereby also maintains production, of course, but it also preserves and furthers ideology by circulating it through the culture. The aim of the advertising industry is not merely to inform us about what is on offer in the marketplace by way of goods or services for sale, but in fact to *create a need in us as consumers* for these things. Accordingly, therefore, we are made to feel anxious about our looks, our health, our sex appeal, our ability to appear presentable in terms of the latest fashions, our possession of "labor-saving" devices, our apparent wealth (or lack of it), and so on, so that we focus, not on the *real* value of these goods and services in terms of actual need or of the gap between what it cost to produce them and what it costs us to acquire them, but rather on our desire for them, *a desire that is represented to us as real need*.

Advertising operates through *interpellation*, an idea developed by the twentieth-century French Marxist theorist Louis Althusser. He suggests that ideology works by interpellating (that is, "hailing" or addressing) us. However, the "us" (or "me") that ideology addresses must be understood less as an actual identity or individual than a *subject*, an important term in studies in sociology, culture, and gender. Whereas it seems only common sense to understand ourselves as autonomous, unique individuals who, possessing both will and agency, act freely in and on the world around us, theories of ideology (and, as we shall see later, also of discourse) by contrast postulate *that our sense of ourselves* (as autonomous agents possessed of free will) in fact *is shaped for us* by forces beyond our control and, indeed, even beyond our awareness of them. Accordingly, we imagine our own uniqueness and autonomy to be beyond question. However,

subjectivity isn't a property that we own, but on the contrary we are subjects of various agencies. Our individual identity, then, is determined, regulated and reproduced as a structure of relationships. For instance, we may be subjects of (subjected to) parental affection/authority; legal protections/compulsion; commercial enterprise/exploitation; national or cultural characteristics/stereotypes; and so on.

(Hartley, 1994b: 309–10)

Althusser specifies this still further. To summarize and clarify his rather tortuous language: the subject comes into existence through ideology, but at the same time ideology is brought into being through the subject, for ideology cannot exist in a void, without a subject. It is, therefore, a reciprocal relationship and existence, and for this reason "ideology has no history" because in effect its history can be only that of the subjects that it constitutes and that constitute it. This means, in turn, that there is no subjectivity outside ideology – no "self" or "identity" that is not already ideological, because it has been formed entirely within ideology (Althusser, 1976: 44–45).

In a famous metaphor, Althusser likens ideology to a policeman on the street who shouts, "Hey, you!" and, because we recognize that each of us is always "you" to someone else, we turn round in response:

By this mere one-hundred-and-eighty-degree physical conversion, he [the person hailed] becomes a *subject*. Why? Because he has recognized that the hail was "really" addressed to him, and that "it was *really* him who was hailed" (and not someone else). Experience shows that the practical telecommunication of hailings is such that they hardly ever miss their man: verbal call or whistle, the one hailed always recognizes that it is really him who is being hailed. And yet it is a strange phenomenon, and one which cannot be explained solely by "guilt feelings," despite the large numbers who "have something on their consciences."

(Althusser, 1976: 48; original emphasis)

That call of "Hey, you!" is issued to us every day in different situations and contexts. We may, for example, be interpellated as children or parents, students or teachers, young people or adults, workers or bosses, and so on.

Gender, too, is an instance of interpellation: we are "hailed" as men or women, and we respond by engaging in the behavior appropriate to the nature of that "hailing." Indeed, if we think about it, we are interpellated in terms of gender in different ways all the time. For example, a male may be interpellated as a son, a father, a partner, a friend, an employer, an employee, a sportsman, and so on. It is unlikely that his behavior in all these instances of interpellation remains consistent. As a simple instance, amongst his close friends or in the changing room of a sports facility, he is likely to use language and behavior that are different from the way he is likely to speak and behave when in the company of his parents, his children, or his boss. From this, we may infer that "masculinity" (and, of course, "femininity" for women) is actually fragmented and multiple for each individual male. In other words, one might exhibit various masculinities during the course of a single day, but ideology smooths over any inconsistencies or possible contradictions among these masculinities, so that it appears to that subject that he behaves throughout in a consistently regular manner as a man (see also Aboim, 2010).

An interesting and more concrete example is furnished by both Jeff Lindsay's *Dexter* novels by (Lindsay, 2004, 2005, 2007, 2009, 2010) and the TV series

based on them (*Dexter*, 2006–). A serial killer who sees it as his task to kill other serial killers, Dexter Morgan must nevertheless function (and function plausibly) as a normal member of society, and of the Miami police force. Because, as a serial killer, he occupies an extremely marginal position, if not indeed a position entirely outside the range of what constitutes centrality/marginality, Dexter is more aware than most of the ways in which he is interpellated: adopted brother to Deborah Morgan, who also works in the police force; colleague to figures like Vince Masuka; subordinate to Lt Migdia (Maria, in the TV series) LaGuerta; boyfriend and later husband to Rita; "mentor" to her daughter Astor and son Cody, both damaged by the violent relationship of their parents and with more than a slight inclination toward murder themselves; and, not least, figure of judgment and vengeance to his victims. Dexter must perform "Dexter," a unified, integrated subject; and much of the tension in the narratives is brought about by the threat not only of the revelation of his true nature, but also of the unraveling of these variously interpellated identities.

Advertising interpellates us as particular kinds of consumer: it isolates specific identities and backgrounds, whether defined by gender, ethnicity or race, class, age, and so on, and it defines particular needs, real or imaginary. For example, advertisements for laundry detergents have traditionally-targeted (interpellated) women as the people responsible for the well-being of the domestic household. Accordingly, women are represented in such commercials as loving, concerned for the cleanliness of the members of the household, especially the children, and as efficient and competent in the maintenance and smooth running of the house. It follows, "therefore" (the scare quotes are intended to draw attention to the fact that this is an artificial logic), that such women would "of course" (naturally, obviously) want the product that cleaned clothes the best. In turn, the public spectacle of the family members arrayed in bright, clean outfits would then reflect on the female consumer of laundry products as demonstrating her concern for her family's comfort and well-being, as well as her "natural" competence as wife and mother.

In thus targeting the women in households across the nation, such commercials also define the gender roles appropriate to those women. To say, if one is a woman, "I don't buy this or any other laundry product, because I have better things to do than wash clothes" is to court condemnation: one would be censured not only as a housewife and mother, *but also as a woman*. Yet the same statement issuing from the mouth of a man would be less likely to attract such criticism.

Advertising of laundry products often draws also on "science," whether this is represented by men and women in lab coats in what appears to be a laboratory, seemingly testing the product to ensure that it does its job better and more effectively than rival brands of the same kind of product, or by invoking chemical terminology ("Now with added X," where "X" is a chemical-sounding word – for instance, "radianite" – whether or not it signifies an actual chemical compound). Such a tactic indicates the function of "science" as ideological. This is not to say that science is purely imaginary, but rather that it can be used in ideological ways.

That science is ideologically valorized in our culture can be tested by imagining a laundry detergent that was sold on the basis that it cleaned better than its competitors because its contact with water released thousands of little fairy folk who specialized in cleaning garments. Our culture no longer credits explanations of phenomena that invoke supernatural events or figures; they are not “scientific.”

Activity 2.3

- Consider the ways in which you might be interpellated during an average day.
 - How many social “identities” are you required to assume through these interpellations?
- Now consider how many versions of “masculinity” or “femininity” you might perform during the course of a day.
 - What consistencies or inconsistencies among those versions do you notice?
- Think about some of the movies or TV shows that you have watched, and the ways in which a character has been interpellated by the other characters.
 - How does this affect the way in which you understand the construction of that character?
- Now consider the way or ways in which you have been interpellated by the movie or TV program: as neutral observer, gendered spectator, moral or ethical judge, etc.
 - How does this affect the way in which you now understand the movie or program?
- Imagine that you are employed by an advertising company to market a laundry detergent to men.
 - What would be the features to which you would draw attention that would make it appealing to male consumer; that is, how would you interpellate that subject?
 - What does that suggest about the ideological construction of masculinity, for example, in terms of what aspects of the male subject are “natural” (essential, biological, anatomical), and which may be classed as “cultural” (constructed, determined by assumption, practice, history, etc.)?

- Now imagine that you have been commissioned to develop an advertising campaign to sell to female consumers an item traditionally identified as purchased by men; for example, power tools.
 - First, consider how such an item is (re-)presented to men, and how that (re-)presentation draws on, highlights, or otherwise invokes “masculinity.” How would you reframe this in order to sell the product to women? What does this suggest about the ideological construction of femininity in relation to masculinity?

Gender may also be understood as ideological in that anatomical, sexual difference is transformed into a system of values that are then presented to us as inevitable and natural. Our complicity with that system is engineered in different ways: for instance, for men, through the offer of sexual and social power; for women, in the promise of support, security, and protection via love and marriage (or its equivalent). In an important way, the gender system interpellates each of us according to our anatomical sex, although there is no *necessary* connection between the latter and the way each of us is interpellated. A fairly clear example of how ideology works in relation to gender can be seen in as simple a sentence as “Boys line up to the right; girls to the left.” Such a statement interpellates those to whom it is addressed in terms of gender; and in a two-gender system in which men tend to be privileged over women, the distinction between “boys” and “girls” is marked: *the very terms incorporate gender difference*, paralleling the assumption of gender difference literally incorporated in the body. The alignment to right or left also carries implications of privilege. As the French feminist Hélène Cixous observes, in pairings like man/woman, right/left, sun/moon, the term on the left of the slash is usually the dominant, privileged term, the one on the right, the subordinate, unprivileged one (Cixous, 1994: 37–38).

However, if we recast the above sentence as “Young people with penises line up on one side; young people with vaginas on the other,” we can see a significant ideological as well as semantic shift. The key term now becomes “young people,” which does not distinguish between male and female, and which therefore interpellates the addressees differently from the earlier instruction. “With penises” or “with vaginas” now becomes simply an attribute, akin to “with brown eyes” or “with blue eyes,” “with green shirts” or “with red shirts”: this formulation does not distinguish between biological males and females, on the one hand, and, on the other, transsexual or intersex individuals. Moreover, “on one side ... on the other” does not give value to and hierarchize spatial position in the same way as “to the right ... to the left” seems to do.

Discourse and gender

Whereas theories of ideology see both power and the meaning it generates as arranged hierarchically, from the top down, theories of discourse by contrast

perceive the entire social structure and its activities as suffused with power. That is, for Foucault and those who have used and developed his theorization of discourse, power does not emanate from any *single* source or structure. Indeed, Foucault postulates that power and knowledge function simultaneously and together: he calls this "power/knowledge." This means more than the fairly commonplace idea that knowledge is power. This is certainly true; for example, think of how helpless one might feel in a strange city or country, where one does not know the layout of the town (where does one go to purchase a particular item? Whom does one ask for directions?, etc.) and may not be able to speak the local language (how does one ask for something in a shop? Does a word that looks familiar mean the same thing there? Do people there use a word one is familiar with for a common item?, etc.). However, rather than seeing power as oppressive, as theories of ideology tend to do, Foucault understands power as *productive*. That is, it *creates* identity, difference, relationships, and the like. Knowledge, in this light, functions alongside power by distinguishing between what is known and what is not known, who knows and who does not know, and how such knowledge organizes the world, society, and the relationship of one subject to others. Put another way, knowledge *positions* one, and that positioning is itself at once both a cause and an effect of power. Thus, power produces knowledge, and knowledge produces power: the two work in reciprocal and complementary ways.

However, power/knowledge also operates through discourse in a deeper, subtler manner. In general, the notion of discourse suggests speech, dialogue, or some other verbal interaction. For example, to many linguists, "discourse" signifies a passage of language longer than a single sentence. However, for Foucault, although this sense is not lost, it is extended and broadened, and made more complex. "Discourse" encompasses not only what people say and write to each other, but also what sorts of cultural preoccupations or themes are most commonly spoken of – or are *permitted to be spoken of*. Moreover, discourse should be understood as embracing social and cultural practices and behaviors of all kinds as a form of indirect speech. Not only do such practices and behaviors tell us something about the people who undertake them, but, like speech or writing considered discursively, they also define cultural preoccupations and themes.

Discourses do not simply provide topics of conversation. Rather, *they determine what can be spoken of and in what way or ways*, as well as what cannot or should not be articulated, and therefore must remain inferiorized, marginalized, or simply silenced. There are, therefore, rules to any discourse, although as members of the culture we are not necessarily aware of these (Foucault calls these rules *regularities*). Moreover, discourses are not necessarily limited to particular social contexts or sites. Indeed, often the discourse may be detected through analysis of a number of different aspects of cultural activity (in Foucault's terms, these are *discursive formations*). As with ideology, then, it is impossible to evade discourse, because not only *what we do or think but also who we are* (or believe ourselves or one another to be) *emerge only in and through discourse*.

Foucault's theory of discourse comes out more fully in his later writings; in his earlier work, he explores the notion of the *episteme*, from the Greek *epistēmē*, a term that is related to the word "epistemology," which means "the study of meaning." Foucault considered how, over time, particular ideas might change significantly in meaning, although the terms by which those meanings were denoted might have remained the same (for example, he investigated the notions of "madness" or "the madman"). He concluded that there were structures by which we understand both language and phenomena in particular ways in specific cultures, at specific historical moments. This type of structure he called the *episteme*; and he argued that it changes over time, and in relation to historical events in the culture, including interaction with neighboring or more exotic cultures.

For example, if you were asked to write a brief descriptive essay about the snake, as a generic term, you would probably think back to your lessons in biology and remember that all life forms are classified in a descending hierarchy from domain through kingdom, phylum, class, order, family, down to genus and species. You would then no doubt situate the snake within that system, noting, for example, that it is a reptile, vertebrate, cold-blooded, and so on. You would probably point out also that some snakes, like the rattlesnake or the cobra, are venomous, whereas others, like the boa or the python, kill by constriction; and you might also add that some snakes, like the grass snake or the pine snake (the latter goes by a number of names), are harmless, at least to humans.

However, if you looked in a medieval bestiary, or book of beasts, you would find the snake described rather differently from what you might expect. Here is what a thirteenth-century English bestiary has to say about the snake:

The snake has three habits: the first of these is that when it grows old its eyes grow dim and if it wants to renew them, it starves itself and fasts for many days until its skin grows loose. Then it looks for a narrow crevice in the rocks. It wriggles into it and sloughs its old skin. And we through many tribulations put off the old Adam for Christ's sake and seek Christ the spiritual rock, and find a narrow fissure, that is, the strait gate. ¶ Its second habit is that when it comes to a river to drink water, it does not take its poison with it, but leaves it behind in a pit. When we come together to hear the heavenly word of God in church, we must leave behind our earthly body, that is, earthly and evil desires. ¶ Its third habit is that if it sees a naked man, it is frightened, but if it sees him clothed, it attacks him. In spiritual terms, the serpent was unable to attack the first man, Adam, as long as he was naked in paradise, but when he was clothed, that is, his body became mortal, then it attacked him.

(Barber, 1999: 196)

This may strike us as a rather fanciful and, from a scientific or biological point of view, not very helpful description. However, as Richard Barber, the translator of this particular bestiary, observes, "the object of the bestiary is not to

document the natural world and to analyse it in order to understand its workings. The writers of bestiaries knew the laws of nature before they began their work, and were concerned only to expound them":

They knew that everything in Creation had a purpose, and that the Creator had made nothing without an ulterior aim in mind. And they knew, too, what that purpose was: the edification and instruction of sinful man. The Creator had made animals, birds and fishes, and had given them their natures or habits, so that the sinner could see the world of mankind reflected in the kingdom of nature, and learn the way to redemption by the examples of different creatures. Each creature is therefore a kind of moral entity, bearing a message for the human reader.

(Barber, 1999: 7)

That is, the episteme in the England (and, more generally, Europe) of the thirteenth century was different from that which determines how we understand the world, humans, and human society today. Medieval thinkers took the universe to be a *Liber Mundi*, or Book of the World, "written" by God and full of meaning. It was the purpose of human learning to read this text and to arrive at an understanding of the secret meanings of all of its parts and interactions. This is substantially different from our episteme today, after the Enlightenment and the waning influence of religious thought, when the purpose of the examination of physical objects and phenomena is to understand them in and of themselves. The episteme, then, is not simply a particle of knowledge, or factual item; rather, *the episteme determines what counts as knowledge*.

To bring the notion of the episteme closer to the question of gender, let us consider an idea that remained influential from as early as classical Greece to as late as the seventeenth century: that the entire universe was made up of only four elements: earth, air, fire, and water. This concept underlay and supported a number of other systems of knowledge. For example, in astrology one or another of these elements is attributed to each of the zodiacal signs. In medicine and notions of health, the theory of the four "humors" (melancholic, choleric, sanguineous, and phlegmatic) assumed that the human body was constituted by the four elements in varying combinations, and that these had particular seats in the body, melancholy, for instance, being produced because of an excess of black bile. Thus, someone diagnosed as possessing a sanguineous humor, whose symptoms were such traits as courage, optimism, and "amorosity" (which could mean anything from a tendency to fall in love easily to outright lecherousness), was dominated by the blood in his or her body, which meant that there was a preponderance of moistness (attributable to the element of water) combined with heat (the element of fire).

The theory of the four elements, then, is part of an episteme that affected not only how the world was *understood*, in terms of analytical knowledge, but also how the world was *perceived*. Even the question of sexual difference and gender could be attributed to this episteme, as Thomas Laqueur shows, in his *Making*

Sex: body and gender from the Greeks to Freud. He demonstrates how scholars, doctors, and other thinkers understood genital difference (that is, penis and vagina) to be the result of a difference of heat in the body. Because life was thought to need heat, it was assumed that semen contained the heat necessary to generate new life. Thus, the male body, and male genitals in particular, were understood to be filled with this vital heat (but only a finite quantity of it, hence the belief that each ejaculation of semen depleted a man's body of its vitality). Indeed, the male genitals were understood to have been "exploded" out of the body cavity because of this very heat. By contrast, because woman was understood to be simply the passive receptacle for this seed/heat of life, the womb was thought of as maintaining only as much heat as was required to sustain the new life being conceived, but not enough to expel the genital organs within her body. Thus, the female reproductive system, according to this episteme, was simply the inverse of the male one (see, for example, Laqueur, 1990: 24–62). Laqueur goes on to demonstrate that, despite the discoveries about human anatomy during the Renaissance and the interest of Enlightenment scientists in the workings of the body, the two-sex/single-genital model of the human reproductive system continued to be taught and published in medical textbooks as late as the early nineteenth century, despite the significant shift in episteme brought about by the Renaissance and the Enlightenment.

We might wonder why this was so; and here we may see the difference between episteme and ideology. Although there was clearly plenty of evidence that the archaic anatomical model did not correspond with what could be observed when the human body was dissected, equally clearly something else operated to keep that model in place in such official sites as medical schools and textbooks. Such willful blindness was generated by an *ideological commitment* to continue to see the female reproductive system as the inverse of the male one, and therefore secondary (and inferior) to it. There was, of course, no *intrinsic* reason why the polarities should not have been reversed, and the male genitals seen as secondary and hence inferior to the female ones ... except that, of course, the entire theory was devised by men, who "naturally" took their own bodies to be the norm. (The word "naturally" is placed between scare quotes in order to signal, once again, that there is nothing natural about this assumption, that it, too, is derived ideologically and, as we shall see, discursively.)

Activity 2.4

- How have you typically thought of "knowledge"?
- Reflect on the epistemic shift brought about by the technological revolution and the broader access to computers, the Internet, and the World Wide Web. Has the idea of "knowledge" changed?
- Research traditionally has consisted of investigation along both a horizontal axis (what have various scholars had to say about the

topic?) and a vertical one (what has been the historical genesis of ideas relevant to the topic, and what have been the “family relationships” among those ideas?).

- Has the World Wide Web, with its array of hyperlink connections, suggested “similar items,” and so on, changed the way we think today about research? If so, in what ways?
- Again, research traditionally has required the researcher to evaluate the material she or he encounters in terms of value and authority, through the weighing of the nature of the documentation, the situating of the authors of such documentation (whether academic, popular, journalistic, etc.), the context of the documentation (whether it is published, say, by a university press or a scholarly journal, or rather by a publisher of popular works), and so on. The World Wide Web offers free access to anyone, anywhere, to post material of any description.
 - How has this affected the idea of the value and authority of researched material – and how does one assess such qualities in research gathered from the Web?

We have considered Foucault’s earlier reliance on the notion of the episteme because it explains the way in which his theory of discourse developed. Although in his later work he quietly dropped the idea of the episteme, it nonetheless underpins his theorization of discourse, to which the notion of power/knowledge became central. For Foucault, the various topics or themes of discourse do not preexist discourse itself, but rather *are created by discourse*. Or, to put it another way, discourse *brings into view* those topics or themes, and in so doing positions us as discursive subjects in relation to these, which in turn means a distribution of power. As a discourse, gender does not simply assign already existing terms like “masculine” and “feminine,” but instead *creates the possibilities for their existence and application*. If gender were truly natural, we ought to be able to talk about animals as being masculine or feminine in attitude and behavior; however, this clearly would make little sense, despite our awareness that animals, like humans, are sexed. For example, could we say of a bull that it behaves in a masculine way – or, conversely, that a cow had a feminine air about her? We can, of course, talk about aggressive behaviors in male animals or submissive ones in female ones; but it is only when these behaviors are imported into the human and social frame that they become tagged “masculine” or “feminine.”

We may think of discourse, in the first place, as *multiple* and, in the second, as *completely permeating the human, social world*, saturating it as various discourses converge or intersect, creating new possibilities through the combination (or subtraction) of specific discourses. Our subjectivity, or sense of self, is thus produced discursively, through the intersection of such discursive strands as sex,

gender, sexuality, age, race or ethnicity, class, and so on. Indeed, we can imagine the social world as a sphere the surface of which is threaded through and through with electrical filaments, each pulsating with power. Those filaments represent discourses; and where they meet, cross each other, or pass by one another, they produce and bring into visibility particular identities, beliefs, situations, ideas, and even events.

It is important, when considering Foucault’s notion of discursive power, to bear in mind, first, that he does not think of power as purely coercive (that is, as forcing individuals or groups to act in certain ways or perform certain deeds) or as purely repressive (that is, as prohibiting the actions or deeds of individuals or groups). He remarks:

power is tolerable only on condition that it mask a substantial part of itself. Its success is proportional to its ability to hide its own mechanisms. Would power be accepted if it were entirely cynical? For it, secrecy is not in the nature of an abuse; it is indispensable to its operation. Not only because power imposes secrecy on those whom it dominates, but because it is perhaps just as indispensable to the latter: would they accept it if they did not see it as a mere limit placed on their desire, leaving a measure of freedom – however slight – intact? Power as a pure limit set on freedom is, at least in our society, the general form of its acceptability.

(Foucault, 1981: 86)

Foucault clarifies his idea further:

By power, I do not mean “power” as a group of institutions and mechanisms that ensure the subservience of the citizens of a given state. By power, I do not mean, either, a mode of subjugation which, in contrast to violence, has the form of the rule. Finally, I do not have in mind a general system of domination exerted by one group over another, a system whose effects, through successive derivations, pervade the entire social body.

(Foucault, 1981: 92)

For Foucault, then, power does not function in the way that Marxist theory conceives it: as operating from the top down through a hierarchy that imposes its will upon those with less access to power. In Foucauldian thought, power is

the moving substrate of force relations which, by virtue of their inequality, constantly engender states of power, but the latter are always local and unstable. The omnipresence of power: not because it has the privilege of consolidating everything under its invincible unity, but because it is produced from one moment to the next, at every point, or rather in every relation from one point to another. Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere. . . . power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are

endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategic situation in a particular society.

(Foucault, 1981: 93)

Where Marxist theory tends to formulate and conceive of power as functioning in a static social structure dominated by a few who wield power over the rest, Foucauldian theory identifies power as something dynamic, arising out of inequalities that shift, turn, and change, and in so doing produce different relations among people and institutions, which in turn produce knowledges of different kinds. Importantly, for Foucault, power is not vested in the hands of the few but is omnipresent, "not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere."

Importantly, Foucault declares, "Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power" (Foucault, 1981: 95). That is, power can exist *as* power only in the presence of resistance, whether actual or only possible. Without resistance, power functions in a vacuum, and therefore ceases to *be* power; there is nothing for it to be exercised upon. Power, therefore, *presupposes* resistance, and seeks to annul, contain, repress, or silence it directly or in anticipation. Foucault emphasizes "the strictly relational character of power relationships":

Their existence depends on a multiplicity of points of resistance: these play the role of adversary, target, support, or handle in power relations. These points of resistance are present everywhere in the power network. Hence there is no single locus of great Refusal, no soul of revolt, source of all rebellions, or pure law of the revolutionary. Instead there is a plurality of resistances, each of them a special case: resistances that are possible, necessary, improbable; others that are spontaneous, savage, solitary, concerted, rampant, or violent; still others that are quick to compromise, interested, or sacrificial; by definition, they can only exist in the strategic field of power relations.

(Foucault, 1981: 95–96)

Just as power is everywhere, so is resistance, or it least its possibility. This is why Foucault states that "there is no single locus of great Refusal," and why he is dubious about revolution as a means of substantially changing discursive formations. Instead, there exists "a plurality of resistances," many of which no doubt occur on a regular, even daily, basis.

He continues:

But this does not mean that they are only a reaction or rebound, forming with respect to the basic domination an underside that is in the end always passive, doomed to perpetual defeat. Resistances do not derive from a few heterogeneous principles; but neither are they a lure or a promise that is of necessity betrayed. They are the odd term in relations of power; they are inscribed in the latter as an irreducible opposite.

(Foucault, 1981: 96)

In thus rejecting the idea of power as monolithic and irresistible, Foucault creates a space within which change is possible. That space also allows for our positioning as subjects in relation to particular discourses and therefore also in relation to the particular forms of power for which specific discourses act as relays.

Let us see how this works by returning to our earlier example of the advertisement for laundry detergent. Where an ideological analysis commences with the assumption that the housewife and mother's gender identity is already established and fixed, framed by particular ideologies, a discursive analysis might ask how the various discourses invoked by such an advertisement *produce* the figure of the "housewife-and-mother." Such discourses include those of gender and the family, which in turn create a discursive formation that we might call domesticity. A happy housewife and mother will create a contented home, which in turn will make her family content: this is the underlying "message" that makes the promotion of this laundry product workable; it has little to do with actual biochemical interactions in the washing machine, or with the chemical structure of the laundry powder itself. The image of the happy housewife draws on a fairly familiar discourse of gender that constructs woman as homemaker and nurturer. Her proper place, therefore, is in the home; this is where she best fulfills her role, even if she is also a worker outside the home. Indeed, the implication in some forms of this kind of commercial is that the product and the technology of such white goods as washing machines and electric dryers *permit* the woman to work outside the home and yet to maintain the role which is hers, apparently by right.

However, when we ask such questions as "Why doesn't the husband and father deal with the laundry?" or "Why isn't at least one of the children detailed to take care of the washing of clothes?", we begin to perceive how the discourses work. They *produce* the adult parents as each occupying a role defined by gender, and the children as dependent beings who not only should *not* be put to work, but who are not really even *capable* of work. Yet this is clearly untrue: in developing countries very young children are often employed as a means of bringing some income into the family coffer; even in Western countries in the not-too-distant past young children were similarly occupied, until labor laws made it illegal to employ children under a certain age. (This, in itself, points to a discourse about children as innocent and helpless beings until they reach a particular age, often arbitrarily defined; yet "the child" as such a figure is of relatively recent appearance, historically speaking.) There are other questions one might ask, for example: "What's the deal with washing clothes regularly anyway? Why not wear them until they become rags and fall off the body, and then buy new ones?" Such interrogations are indices of areas of possible resistance to the discourses that are at work in such an advertisement. However, the text of the advertisement itself is created and framed in such a way as to deflect our attention from such possible points of resistance, thereby encouraging us to remain attentive and obedient to the familiar discourses being rehearsed.

Let us also briefly revisit the *Dexter* narratives, and consider them now in relation to discourse. Such a reading shows that Dexter shifts among various discourses, for instance, those of the family, domesticity, morality, and so on.

A serial killer intent on protecting his subjectivity as a serial killer, Dexter must make himself aware of the discursive formations (although of course these are not presented as such in the narratives) and become adept at negotiating them. It is that consciousness, as much as his murderous identity, that sets him apart from the other characters (aside, of course, from the other serial killers).

Must one make a choice between ideology and discourse as ways of framing, analyzing, and understanding cultural texts and phenomena – and, for our purposes, the workings and meanings of gender? Sara Mills observes that, “For some, discourse is the larger term within which there exist [sic] a range of different ideologies, whilst for others ideologies are made manifest through a variety of different discourses,” and she notes: “It is part of the history of the usage of the term discourse that it has been constituted in reaction to the meanings associated with the term ideology, and that struggle with the concept ideology is still a part of its current range of meanings” (Mills, 1997: 46).

It is no doubt possible to speak of *gender* as an ideology, if what we have in mind is that gender tends to privilege and serve the interests of a particular group in the culture. From this perspective, anatomical sex becomes the basis on which is erected the superstructure of gender. Accordingly, much feminist critique of gender, especially in the 1960s and 1970s, was grounded in a Marxist theorizing of gender, and therefore tended to construct men as the oppressors and women as the oppressed. This necessarily meant that more attention was paid to the position of women in such a power structure, and was inclined to neglect the possibility that there were power differentials also among men.

Moreover, it left unanswered the question of whether it was indeed possible for women to overthrow that structure in order to produce a more equitable set of gender relations. Rather, it seemed, women were instead committed to a tactics of fringe warfare, challenging masculine power and the social situations that it created. By contrast, a discursive analysis seeks to undo gender structures and relations at all levels and in all dimensions, in the process interrogating *both* masculinity *and* femininity. That said, we should note that it is possible to talk about masculine ideologies, rather than *an ideology* of masculinity. Such ideologies might include such characteristics of the masculine as stoicism as an ideal, strength and courage as desirable traits, and so on.

Nonetheless, it is important to bear in mind that these characteristics, however desirable, are not necessarily grounded in the body. That is, they are not naturally *inherent* in maleness. The question, therefore, arises as to how they have come to be assumed as key elements of masculinity. To address this issue, we turn in the next chapter to the work of Judith Butler, who uses Foucauldian theory to explore the nature of gender.

Suggested further reading

- Beasley, C. (2005) *Gender and Sexuality: critical theories, critical thinkers*, Los Angeles: Sage.
- Fulcher, J. (2004) *Capitalism: a very short introduction*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Glover, D. and Kaplan, C. (2000) *Genders*, London and New York: Routledge.

Gutting, G. (2005) *Foucault: a very short introduction*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Kimmel, M.S. and Plante, R.F. (eds) (2004) *Sexualities: identities, behaviors, and society*, New York: Oxford University Press.

Pascoe, C.J. (2007) *Dude, You're a Fag: masculinity and sexuality in high school*, Berkeley: University of California Press.

Seidman, S., Fischer, N. and Meeks, C. (eds) (2011) *Introducing the New Sexuality Studies*, London and New York: Routledge.