

We will explore the connections between gender, power and identity in the lives of undergraduate students by conducting semi-structured interviews. After analysing the transcribed interviews, it was found men and women are positioned and valued different within society, which was reflected in participant's everyday lives and influenced their future decisions.

Introduction

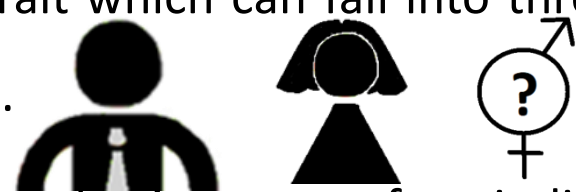
This study analyses two interviews relating to language and gender, and its connections to power and identity. Gendered theory remains a useful analytical tool to understand how overarching sociocultural frames impact the lives of men and women. We will explore how discourses shape western culture and to what extent are gendered roles embedded into daily social practices by using a grounded theory approach.

What is an ideology?

Ideologies are the expression of "social, cultural and historical" beliefs (Fairclough, 2015, p.15). Althusser (2014) believed ideologies help society function by coming together to create a "mutually" agreed upon set of values. Hegemonic (or dominant) beliefs are commonly enacted in discourses, which Althusser (1977) claims, shapes a "false consciousness" with how people view the world as ideologies can be used to benefit those in higher power. Discourses may be structured around ideologies that are inherently wrong and once they become common sense knowledge for a culture, they are given a high level of credence.

How can we analyse gender?

Butler's (2002) work on Performativity has been influential into questioning the concept of gender. The premise suggests gender and sex are different states; sex is a biological trait which can fall into three categories (XX,XY, or intersex).



Whereas gender is a part of an individuals' self-identity, which knows no bounds other than the culture restraining a persons' perception of 'gender'. Gender is a fluid performance, where the differences between men and women are socially constructed through discursive practices until they become naturalized (Butler, 2011). This leads to assigned values, judgements and beliefs about how women and men should behave, who they should desire, and causes an unnecessary homogenous divide between the genders.

How can we analyse power?

Field Theory by Bourdieu (1993) helps explore how Performativism is integrated into systems of structure. Bourdieu (1993) argues reality is a social concept organised into three factors: field, capital and habitus. There are progressively more 'specialised groups' within Western society, each with their own specific rules and conventions, known as fields. The power enacted within fields leaves people predisposed to behave in certain ways. Bourdieu writes, that a person's capital helps form their social reality and predetermines their possible courses of action, social class and upbringing. Capitals are comprised of:



Social Capital ('who you know')



Cultural Capital (Expertise in adhering to cultural codes)



Economic Capital (financial well-being)

Methodology

Two semi-structured interviews were conducted in order to collect rich interpretive data to better understand the social world of the interviewee. One male and one female Oxford Brookes students were chosen, and each 30-minute interview focused on pivotal life moments: childhood experiences, romantic relationships, career and life pursuits, and expression of self. The key themes behind this study were the participants' relationship to gender, and to what extent was it enacted in their social practices (field, capital and habitus). By using a grounded theory approach, it allows the analyst to uncover social connections effectively.

ADHERING TO THE RULES OF THE FIELD (CAPITALISM)

"Choosing between having a fashion career or family, I would definitely choose my family. And if my financial situation allows it, I would like to quit my job... But ah I'm studying communication at the moment and I'd like to do a masters next year."

Claire wants to pursue a career in Fashion in order to transform her passion into financial action. This is a realistic goal for Claire, who is in a powerful position, being from an upper class habitus means there is more flexibility in her career choices. However, Claire values family and is willing to 'sacrifice' a career for the ideology of motherhood.

"I definitely wanted to go into politics but there's so much pressure to succeed and to just make it, just to get by...living is finding ways to just exist within society and it has to do with doing the easy thing, like journalism."

Choosing a career in journalism instead of politics is a result of Marq playing by the rules of the field to increase economic capital and form a middle class habitus. The ideology of capitalist culture focuses on personal responsibility to make one's own life happier and productive, and a focus on employable skills. Marq describes the relationship between having a lower standard of life inevitably encroaches on personal happiness anyway, so he conforms to capitalist doxa.

GAINING SOCIAL CAPITAL VIA CULTURAL CODES

"Obviously if I'm with somebody who's in a powerful position in his job for example, in life, that kind of reflects on me as well. So people will think I'm powerful too."

Claire's following the doxa means she gains social capital; a woman's conformity to performative gestures of femininity are fast ways to gain "perceived popularity" (Bendl, 2008). She presents status with extended versions of herself, like the reputation of her husband. The only time she mentions 'power' is when describing her ideal man, even though she expresses the desire for status. It suggests Claire considers 'power' a masculine trait which she cannot pertain herself.

"My professors helped me gain access to a lot of different things...it gave me social clout in a different way that's traditional."



Marq gains social capital by talking to teachers in order to gain resources and benefits. Bendl (2008) writes, "perceived popularity" in men is reflected through their competitiveness with other men in order to get resources which is seen in broader society too. There is a correlation between social capital in high school and adult life, suggesting even children can recognise and desire social capital which may relate to the wider socio-cultural codes and conventions at play.

ASSIMILATION AND DEVIATION

"My sense of style is pretty girlish because I like to wear dresses, I like to wear heels, I like to wear makeup, lipstick. In particular, accessories, nail polish, and things like that."



Claire acting within the codes and conventions of a field is a self-beneficial cycle. Claire has an ideological notion of what constitutes popular feminine beauty, and this idea is commodified. As a result, Claire has assimilated into her culture without fear of rejection. And since Claire benefitted from acting feminine, it is logical she will want her child to experience life the way she did. So her child will grow up with the same ideological concept of femininity and beauty.

"There were a lot of my classmates they thought that I was gay. Uh I don't know if it was because I was in drama and I was y'know, acting a lot or I was just more flamboyant than the other boys..."



Marq has a strong want for authenticity which goes against the ideology of the field. Dressing/behaving differently may result in 'symbolic violence', (Butler, 2002) where certain ways of being are discriminated against as it poorly reflects on Marq's lower social and class status. It is considered 'violent' because values are inflicted onto Marq, who cannot reach the codes and conventions set by his culture due to his working class habitus.

Conclusion

The themes which were identified has helped illustrate how each interviewee has a complex relationship with their identity in relation to culture. In Claire's case, her upper class habitus meant her values were inflicted onto lower class individuals,. Alternatively, Marq's interview gave an insight into how working class individuals attempt to build a middle class habitus, and how they are faced with backlash for doing so. While both recognise the capital they have leads to different courses of action, by comparing the two interviews it highlights the social disparities men and women.

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