

Suggested lecture/seminar plan for Chapter 9

Introduce lecture by asking students to define power and to provide one example of a personal experience of power, as they define it. Use their answers to discuss mainstream understandings of power, drawing attention to the common-sense notion that it is a possession or personal commodity (15 minutes).

Outline the structural approach to power. Ask students to consider whether they think any groups in society are dominated, and why they may accept this domination as reasonable or acceptable. (10 minutes)

Outline power from the post-structuralist perspective, emphasising the idea that it is a set of techniques, not something that is possessed by individuals. Ask students to think of two ways in which workers in organizations are subject to surveillance (15 minutes).

Define discourse. Ask students to think of the 'norms' that affect their behaviour and identities as students and relate the discussion to discourse and identity (15 minutes).

Conclude by asking students to give one example of a situation in which they have not complied with a norm. Ask them to consider the extent to which this represents 'resistance'. (5 minutes)

Discussion question guidelines for Chapter 9

- 1. Could we understand the consent of the part-time professional to their 'marginal' status as an example of false consciousness?**

Why or why not?

Could we understand the consent of the part-time professional to their 'marginal' status as an example of false consciousness? Why or why not?

The concept of false consciousness is derived from Marxist theory. The basic premise is that the 'real' state of affairs in capitalist societies is that the dominant capital owning classes have power over, and exploit, the subordinated working classes, who, though greater in number, accept this unequal distribution of wealth as representing the natural social order. Marx

termed this acceptance, “false consciousness” and argued that when the subordinated classes came to ‘see’ the reality of their exploitation, they would collectively resist and even overturn capitalist modes of production. One way of explaining part-time professionals’ acceptance of their marginalisation is to attribute this to false consciousness – they simply do not yet see that they are, in fact, disadvantaged. The problem with this view is one of ‘ontological privilege’ – the idea that one particular group (in this case, academics) can see things as they really are, whereas other groups can’t. Post-structuralism rejects this view, arguing that no perspective on any given reality is any more accurate than any other, rather, that we need to understand how certain perspectives come to be taken for granted as the correct way to see things. In the case of the part-time professional, therefore, the task is to understand why these individuals accept their positions as acceptable, given that compared to the positions of other professionals, they are relatively disadvantaged. Note that the key point here is not that part-time professionals should be persuaded that they are disadvantaged, rather that we understand the processes through which their acceptance of their positions is produced, as well as identifying those processes that may cause some others to be discontented.

2. What discourses can you identify that ‘construct’ the identity of professional workers? Whose interests do these discourses serve?

Discourses are ‘statements that construct an object’. Discourses construct many objects in the social world, including education, gender, criminality, and class, and in this sense create the social categories with which we are so

familiar and which we take for granted. In creating these objects, discourses also create identities, as people understand themselves in relation to the various social categories to which they belong. In the case, we can understand the 'professional' as an object constructed through discourse – the notion that occupations exist that carry specific, usually high-level knowledge or expertise. In constructing the object, 'profession' discourses also construct subjects (identities), professionals. In the case, we can see that professionals can be constructed to be committed, full-time, willing to work extra hours, interested in career progression, and available for managers to communicate with. It could be argued that these discourses are more likely to serve the interests of men, rather than women, since these 'norms' are easier to comply with if one has not got domestic commitments. Additionally, these discourses serve the interests of organizations. If professionals are willing to work very hard and at a high level purely because this helps them identify themselves as a professional, then the organization is surely the winner.

3. Do agree with Hyde's reading of the situation? If consent is also resistance, what might change?

From the post-structuralist perspective, failure to comply with the norms (contained in discourse) that construct any given social category can be read as resistance. It is important to note that this does not necessarily mean a conscious rejection of any given discourse. Rather, that in not complying, a site or a space opens up where alternative meanings or discourses can develop. In the case, for example, Hyde's argument is that professional part-timers are challenging the norms of professional, but most, nevertheless,

continue to see themselves as professionals. Whether the situation for part-time professionals will change does depend on the extent to which this resistance at the level of identity, translates into more material acts of resistance. Nonetheless, given the increasing rates of professional women (and men) taking up reduced hours or part-time working, the subject position of the professional is already being re-written to some extent. These individuals are demonstrating that it is possible to be a good professional without having to make work the most central aspect of one's life.