

STUDYING PSYCHOTHERAPEUTIC KNOWLEDGE:  
NOTES TOWARD A WORKING DEFINITION OF IDEOLOGY\*

Mary-Anne Kandrack  
Department of Sociology-Anthropology  
Carleton University

In the broadest terms, my interest in psychotherapy concerns the production and circulation of knowledge and the reproduction/transformation of relations of domination and subordination. More specifically, I am currently examining the limits and possibilities of feminist therapy as a transformative politics and emancipatory intervention. The purpose of this discussion, assuming that it is in and through discourse and discursive practices that knowledge and ideology are linked, is to suggest how ideology might be defined in the development of an analytical framework for the critical exegesis of feminist therapy that is being undertaken.

Before proceeding, it should be noted that my attempt to (re)conceptualize ideology is, at least in part, a response to Foucault's rejection of the concept (cf., 1980: 118). This simply cannot be detailed here. Suffice it to say that it is imperative to recognize power/knowledge as discursive practices that are as enabling as they are constraining (Foucault, 1972, 1980; Thompson, 1980) and, at the same time, to employ the concept of ideology as an analytical tool for specifying, with greater clarity and precision, the distinction between subjugation and empowerment (Kress, 1985).

The concept of ideology, as the literature demonstrates, is highly controversial (Larrain, 1978; Marx and Engels, 1970; Ricoeur, 1986; Thompson: 1984). It is not within the scope of this discussion to provide even a cursory review of the work in this area. One significant issue concerning the concept, however, is the manner in which it has lost its critical, analytical edge inasmuch as it has been used to refer to belief systems in general with little or no reference to the critique of domination for which it was originally intended (Jacoby, 1975; Thompson, 1984). The result of this is that virtually everything and anything can be and has been construed as ideological thereby rendering the concept little more than a descriptive label. In short, the concept becomes an adjective with minimal, if any, analytical utility. Notwithstanding the difficulties associated with efforts to theorize ideology, I take the position that such a concept is invaluable to my research to the extent that it assists in distinguishing between domination and resistance.

My effort to reformulate the concept of ideology proceeds by situating it in relation to the substantive problem at hand, namely, the contemporary discourse of mental illness. Therefore, it is important to consider the discursive practices/knowledges

characteristic of psychotherapeutic rationality in the apparatuses of subjugation, regulation and control. The rise to pre-eminence of positivistic science, for example, has been a significant concern in the history of psychiatry (Brown, 1984; Foucault, 1973; Ingleby, 1983; Scull, 1979). Positivistic rationality is implicated in the knowledge(s) that construct the comprehension of socio-cultural as well as material reality (Habermas, 1970). There are a number of problems with the transposition of these epistemological and methodological precepts from the natural to social worlds (Ingleby, 1983; Turner, 1988).

Habermas (1970), for example, provides a clear articulation of the implications of these developments for the 'social life world'. Most notable among these is the 'objectification' of fundamentally social processes, namely, human behaviour and experience. While science and technology are referred to as ideological, the concept of ideology is never explicitly defined. His analysis is nonetheless informative although the meaning of ideology must be inferred from its usage. In an effort to reformulate the concept for the purpose of my analysis of feminist therapy, I would suggest that for Habermas (1970) the concept of ideology refers precisely to the objectification of social processes for the purpose of technical manipulation and control (as opposed to practical or emancipatory aims {Habermas, 1972}).

Habermas (1970) breaks with the orthodox Marxist preoccupation with the strictly economic determination of social relations inasmuch as he suggests that science and technology constitute the contemporary system of domination and subordination which is particularly insidious because it also provides for its own legitimation. This opens a much broader space in which to examine the power/knowledge nexus (Foucault, 1980) compared to that determined by economic exigencies. In short, the objectification of human subjects is in no sense determined exclusively or unproblematically by the economic. Moreover, legitimation is itself another dimension of ideology to the extent that "relations of domination are represented as legitimate" (Thompson, 1984: 131).

A third dimension of ideology is the manner in which language constructs specific understandings of social life (Kress, 1985). I would concur, that is, with Finn's (1982) argument that ideology refers specifically to discourses that mystify the nature of social reality. More specifically, mystification refers to the presentation of "a partial truth about reality as if it were the whole truth" (Finn, 1982: 41). To illustrate this, consider the notion of the 'individualization' of deviance. In this process, deviance is located inside the individual as a function of some defective organic and/or biographical process. This is only part of the story as it were, since individualization obscures the social relations/processes constitutive of and constituted by agency, deviant or otherwise. Related to this is what Thompson refers to as "dissimulation" in which "relations of domination...present

themselves as something other than what they are" (1980:131). For example, psychotherapeutic discursive practices are never articulated as processes of regulation and control but rather as humane treatments.

Lastly, Finn (1982) also argues that ideology is involved not only in the mystification of social reality but also in its reification. This suggests that certain conceptualizations of social processes and human subjects ascribe to them fixed, immutable properties (ie., objectification) that circumscribe both conceptual and practical activity vis-a-vis the process/subject in question (ie., mystification). These conceptualizations become reified to the extent that they are taken to be objectively given facts revealed in and through language. This serves to obfuscate the socially constructed nature of knowing and knowledge by separating the knower from the known (Finn, 1982). Reification affords certain discourses and discursive practices a transhistorical and universal character thereby reproducing the power relations within which they are articulated. This is to suggest that, in the case of the individualization of deviance, efforts to account for and ameliorate deviance must conform to that which is construed as most 'reasonable' (cf., Foucault, 1973), namely, those aimed at the individual.

This is, admittedly, only a sketch of the contours of ideology, but it is a start. The dimensions of ideology outlined above provide a starting point for an analysis of ideology, as it is articulated in discursive practices, as discourses that reproduce rather than contest power relations (Thompson, 1984: 131). What remains to be done in fleshing out the concept is to conceptualize it in relation to a broader social theory (Thompson, 1984). This cannot, however, be undertaken here.

By way of conclusion, it is clear that the study of the production and circulation of knowledge(s) benefits significantly from the considerations proper to post-structuralism, most notably Foucault (1972; 1980), which inform my research. The present discussion in no way addresses or settles all of the problems nascent in this area of research, and in fact, may well add to them. However, I would suggest that it provides some direction in conceptualizing ideology as an analytical tool in a critical examination of disciplinary knowledges, in this case, feminist therapy.

#### ENDNOTES

\* These 'notes' are drawn from a discussion developed in my doctoral thesis, Knowledge, Ideology and Resistance: Politics and Possibility in Feminist Therapy.

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