

Reading and Doing Ethnography

Social Anthropology 314

2.2 Ideology

What is ideology?

Common sense definition

To claim in ordinary conversation that someone is speaking ideologically is surely to hold that they are judging a particular issue through some rigid framework of preconceived ideas which distorts their understanding.

— Eagleton (3)

Classical Marxist definition

The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas: i.e. the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of production at its disposal has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it.

— Marx, German Ideology

Generalized class legitimation

Ideology has to do with legitimating the power of a dominant social group or class.

— Eagleton (5)

How legitimation works

*A dominant power may legitimate itself by **promoting** beliefs and values congenial to it; **naturalizing** and **universalizing** such beliefs so as to render them self-evident and apparendy inevitable; **denigrating** ideas which might challenge it; **excluding** rival forms of thought, perhaps by some unspoken but systematic logic; and **obscuring** social reality in ways convenient to itself*

— Eagleton (5-6)

Ideological presuppositions and effects

Not every ideological utterance is factually false; it's the ideological function that makes it problematic, not strictly the empirical inaccuracy. For instance: "The economy will suffer if there is land redistribution."

People dislike blatant inequality
and injustice

The majority of people have a fairly sharp eye to their own rights and interests, and most people feel uncomfortable at the thought of belonging to a seriously unjust form of life. Either, then, they must believe that these injustices are en route to being amended, or that they are counterbalanced by greater benefits, or that they are inevitable, or that they are not really injustices at all...

It is part of the function of a dominant ideology to inculcate such beliefs. It is part of the function of a dominant ideology to inculcate such beliefs. It can do this either by falsifying social reality, suppressing and excluding certain unwelcome features of it, or suggesting that these features cannot be avoided.

— Eagleton (27)

Ideology of common sense

"Women are naturally good at housework and childcare."

"Men are naturally violence."

So as an ethnographer:

- >> Notice how people justify prejudice and inequality.
- >> Notice the effect of ideological statements.

But ideology is not
only about power and
ideas

Ideology as imaginary relationship

Ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence.

— Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses"

Ideology as recognition

*[Ideology] 'transforms' the individuals
into subjects... by that very precise
operation which I have called
interpellation or hailing, and which can
be imagined along the lines of the most
commonplace everyday police (or other)
hailing: **'Hey, you there!'***

Assuming that the theoretical scene I have imagined takes place in the street, the hailed individual will turn round. By this mere 180-degree physical conversion, he 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).

— Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses"

Ideology is when you embrace your
place in this world

So as an ethnographer:

- >> Notice how people *embrace* their place.
- >> Notice why people *explain* their place.
- >> Notice how people embrace *other people's place*.

The Politics of Housework

Women's Liberation—and housework. What? You say this is all trivial? Wonderful! That's what I thought. It seemed perfectly reasonable. We both had careers, both had to work a couple of days a week to earn enough to live on, so why shouldn't we share the housework? So I suggested it to my mate and he agreed—most men are too hip to turn you down flat. You're right, he said. It's only fair.

— Pat Mainardi (1970)

The Politics of Housework

Then an interesting thing happened. I can only explain it by stating that we women have been brainwashed more than even we can imagine. Probably too many years of seeing television women in ecstasy over their shiny waxed floors or breaking down over their dirty shirt collars. Men have no such conditioning. They recognize the essential fact of housework right from the very beginning. Which is that it stinks.

The Politics of Housework

Here's my list of dirty chores: buying groceries, carting them home and putting them away; cooking meals and washing dishes and pots; doing the laundry; digging out the place when things get out of control; washing floors. The list could go on but the sheer necessities are bad enough. All of us have to do these things, or get someone else to do them for us.

The Politics of Housework

The longer my husband contemplated these chores, the more repulsed he became, and so proceeded the change from the normally sweet, considerate Dr. Jekyll into the crafty Mr. Hyde who would stop at nothing to avoid the horrors of-housework. As he felt himself backed into a corner laden with dirty dishes, brooms, mops and reeking garbage, his front teeth grew longer and pointier, his fingernails haggled and his eyes grew wild.

The Politics of Housework

"I don't mind sharing the housework, but I don't do it very well. We should each do the things we're best at."

MEANING: Unfortunately I'm no good at things like washing dishes or cooking. What I do best is a little light carpentry, changing light bulbs, moving furniture. (How often do you move furniture?)

ALSO MEANING: Historically the lower classes (black men and us) have had hundreds of years experience doing menial jobs. It would be a waste of manpower to train someone else to do them now.

ALSO MEANING: I don't like the dull, stupid, boring jobs, so you should do them.

The Politics of Housework

"I don't mind sharing the work, but you'll have to show me how to do it."

MEANING: I ask a lot of questions and you'll have to show me everything every time I do it because I don't remember so good. Also don't try to sit down and read while I'M doing my jobs because I'm going to annoy hell out of you until it's easier to do them yourself."

The Politics of Housework

"I hate it more than you. You don't mind it so much."

MEANING: Housework is garbage work. It's the worst crap I've ever done. It's degrading and humiliating for someone of my intelligence to do it. But for someone of your intelligence....

The Politics of Housework

"In animal societies, wolves, for example, the top animal is usually a male even where he is not chosen for brute strength but on the basis of cunning and intelligence. Isn't that interesting?"

MEANING: I have historical, psychological, anthropological and biological justification for keeping you down. How can you ask the top wolf to be equal?

The Politics of Housework

"Women's liberation isn't really a political movement."

MEANING: The revolution is coming too close to home.

ALSO MEANING: I am only interested in how I am oppressed, not how I oppress others. Therefore the war, the draft and the university are political. Women's liberation is not.

The Politics of Housework

"Man's accomplishments have always depended on getting help from other people, mostly women. What great man would have accomplished what he did if he had to do his own housework?"

MEANING: Oppression is built into the system and I, as the white American male, receive the benefits of this system. I don't want to give them up.

Gender relations are exceptionally
ideologized.

If you question one justification for
an ideology, another one takes its
place.

Macy's Introduces Ideology

Macy's Introduces Ideology with Cheryl Burke

Thu., Dec. 8, 2011, 2:36 pm EST

I sat down with two-time “Dancing with the Stars” winner Cheryl Burke at Macy’s Ideology launch, for which Cheryl is the face of, to get the scoop on the new activewear line, her stay-fit secrets and more.

Q: Can you talk about Ideology and what intrigued you about this partnership?

A: Macy's and Ideology asked me to partner with them and the moment I tried on the clothes I knew we were a perfect fit. I have a very curvy body type so I can relate to a lot of women out there and I think this line really makes my body look good. I also feel really good in it, which is important to me because working out is my job.

Q: You live a very active lifestyle. What are some of the things you look for when choosing activewear for yourself?

A: What's most important to me is comfort. I need to feel like I can bend my body any way it wants to go, and I feel this line really adapts to your body. The sports bra, for instance, really stretches to make you feel good, yet it still holds everything in. It's the same thing with the pants. Normally, with my body shape, I hate wearing capri pants, but when I first tried on Ideology's capri pants, they made me feel really good because **they cover what you want to hide while highlighting your assets.**

Q: Do you have any tips for women looking to shape up?

A: Just always stay active. Bust a sweat every single day, because that's what's going to make you want to eat better and make you feel better.

Ideology, which will feature neutral and brightly hued jackets, sweatshirts, tops, bras, pants, shorts and accessories ranging from \$7.98 to \$58, will hit Macy's stores in Spring 2012.

Some ideological things to note here

- >> Physical "fit" is also commercial "fit."
- >> You can have an egalitarian partnership with a huge corporation.
- >> Activity is naturally the best form of existence.
- >> If you buy this product, you will feel good about yourself.
- >> The world is irrevocably divided up by gender (that's how you know this is strictly for women!).

Sources

- >> "Macy's introduces ideology," <http://web.archive.org/web/20120303100407/http://www.mylifetime.com/style/fashion/all-the-looks-insider-blog/macys-introduces-ideology-with-cheryl-burke>
- >> "The Politics of Housework," <http://www.feministezine.com/feminist/modern/The-Politics-of-Housework.html>