



## ***The Philosophical Foundations of Foucaultian Discourse Analysis***

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### **Abstract**

*Discourse analysis may be performed in different ways, but all of the procedural variations share some philosophical underpinnings. This article will describe the theoretical antecedents for the Foucaultian version of this useful method of inquiry.*

*Keywords: Foucault, discourse analysis*

### **1. Introduction**

Discourse analysis (also called critical discourse analysis) is a relatively recent approach to the examination of systematic bodies of knowledge arising from the traditions of critical social theory and linguistic analysis (Barker and Galasinski 2001; Fairclough 1995; Gavey 1997; Gray 1999, Hinshaw, Feetham and Shaver 1999; McNay 1992; Phillips and Hardy 2002; Phillips and Jorgensen 2002; Titscher, Meyer, Wodak and Vetter 2000; Wodak and Meyer 2001; Wood and Kroger 2000). Discourse analysis may be performed in different ways, but all of the procedural variations share some goals and assumptions (Wood and Kroger 2000). The application to diverse disciplines has so far prevented a singular perspective (Cheek and Rudge 1994) but such a perspective may not be necessary (Denzin and Lincoln 2000). Discourse analysis differs from other traditions such as semiotics and ethnomethodology in that it emphasizes analysis of the power inherent in social relations (Lupton 1992). This article will situate discourse analysis among other traditions of research and social critique so that the reader can understand the theoretical basis for the Foucaultian version of this useful method of inquiry (Powers 2001).

Discourse has been defined as 'a group of ideas or patterned way of thinking which can be identified in textual and verbal communications, and can also be located in wider social structures' (Lupton 1992: 145). Discourse analysis provides insight into the functioning of bodies of knowledge in their specific situated contexts by generating interpretive claims with regard to the power effects of a discourse on groups of people, without claims of generalizability to other contexts (Cheek 1997).

The theoretical basis for discourse analysis is based on several historical developments in the philosophy of science and social theory. As an approach to analyzing systematic bodies of knowledge (discourses), discourse analysis participates in several traditions of western thought. I will describe these traditions and the influence they have had on the development of Foucaultian discourse analysis. The major theoretical influences on the method are critical social theory, anti-foundationalism, postmodernism and feminism (Powers

2001). Each of these influences will be discussed and the relevance for Foucaultian discourse analysis will be demonstrated.

## **2. Critical social theory**

The tradition of critical social theory has roots in Marxist thought and the literary traditions of critique and literary criticism (DeMarco et al. 1993). Critical social theory has been found to be a useful approach for nursing inquiry (Thompson 1985, 1987; Allen 1985; Hedin 1986; Dzurec 1989; Doering 1992). What we now call critical social theory arose from the Marxist studies of the Institute of Social Research established in Frankfurt in 1923, and since called the Frankfurt School (Held 1980). There are theoretical differences among the primary authors: Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse, Lowenthal and Pollock, but these differences do not, preclude us from stating, in some instances, the position of critical theorists generally. Presently, the name most often associated with critical social theory is Jürgen Habermas (Held 1980).

Critical social theory can be defined as a critique of historically based social and political institutions that oppress people, while at the same time having a situated practical intent to decrease such oppression (Leonard 1990). The practical intent of a critical social theory is intended to provide people with the tools to change oppressive situations, whether it is perceived by or hidden from them. A critical theory without the practical dimension is therefore called 'bankrupt on its own terms' (Leonard 1990: 3).

A critical social theory describes how groups of people exist in relation to the historically based dominant ideologies that structure their experience. The specific process advocated by critical theory is the bringing about of self-liberating practices among groups of people using awareness of oppressive conditions. It is not clear exactly how these self-liberating practices are to be brought about, but it is clear that the practices must not be forced upon people by researchers or anyone else. As an example, I have discussed the coercive turn in the use by health professions of the term *empowerment* elsewhere (Powers 2003) and therefore choose not to use this term to refer to these self-liberating practices. Using the notions of ideology and false consciousness, critical theory seeks to identify ways in which social phenomena might become less oppressive. The ultimate goal of a critical theory is the emancipation of human beings as a consequence of becoming aware of an alternate interpretation, which includes a preferable future (Molony 1993).

## **3. Ideology and false consciousness**

Ideology is defined as a 'representation of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence' (Althusser 1971: 162). Althusser argued that ideology is a process that obscures the fact that unacknowledged value systems are operating in a systematic manner to oppress people. Ideology is an interpretation (or representation) of a social relationship that creates social meaning and has social consequences. Marxist theory, for example, presents a representation (or interpretation) of the

relationship between people and their conditions of existence under the economic system of capitalism. Marxism advances descriptions of ideologies among the owning class that have the effect of oppressing people in the working class. Marxist theory describes how people are oppressed by the operation of the unacknowledged value systems of the owning class.

Habermas (1973), however, argued for the existence of ideologies other than capitalism in our advanced industrialized society that also function unconsciously as a tool of domination, preventing individuals from perceiving that they are the victims of exploitation in increasing areas of their lives (Molony 1993). Critical theorists make the claim that when people are presented with the representation, they can recognize the oppressive consequences of the ideology, and make sense of it in their social reality.

According to Marxist theory, the ideology of capitalism produces a false consciousness in the working class: an illusion that the work of individuals results in personal gain. Marxist theory provides the alternate interpretation to the working class: that their work functions instead to reproduce the conditions (and relations) of production for benefit, not to themselves, but to the owning class. Marxist theory uses the term *false consciousness* to refer to the understanding of the working class, because Marxism assumes the existence of a true consciousness in which the relations of domination are revealed. The validity of other possible representations (or interpretations) of the conditions of existence among people under capitalism are denied.

The authors of the Frankfurt School, on the other hand, argued that it is not necessary to assume the existence of a single true interpretation of the conditions of existence to which to appeal in the process of determining that people are being deceived. It is not necessary to assume that there is some deep hidden true meaning or interpretation within a discourse that is the cause of a false consciousness (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1983). Instead, the Frankfurt authors argued that people may be deluded by one interpretation of reality, only to be convinced of their delusion by another interpretation that seems to be preferable or more explanatory to them in their own context. The interpretation may not be any more true in some objective sense, but may indeed be more preferable. Furthermore, there may be many such competing interpretations. Traditions of inquiry such as discourse analysis, feminism, interpretive ethnography and critical hermeneutics all share this view of preferable interpretations with the critical social theorists (Denzin 1997).

#### **4. *Foundationalism and its critique by critical social theory***

The word *foundationalism* describes some of the underlying assumptions of the empirical analytic tradition of scientific inquiry. The empirical analytic tradition is a narrow approach to the description of an assumed pre-existing reality and its functioning available to us through sense data. The so-called *natural sciences* are the most commonly cited examples of the empirical analytic tradition and are examples of what is labeled foundationalism in contemporary philosophical thought.

The methods of empirical analytic science were originally designed for, and explicitly aimed toward, technical exploitation and control of natural

phenomena (Held 1980; Kusch 1991). Among the critical theorists, Habermas observed that human beings have become both the subjects and the objects of these control strategies that had originally been designed for natural phenomena (Kusch 1991). Habermas (1971) argued that the functioning of science, technology, industry and administration are intimately connected, producing a continually escalating level of technical control over people in order to increase predictability and efficiency. The critique provided by critical social theorists addressed the foundational assumptions of the empirical analytic tradition of science as described by the empirical school of philosophical thought called logical positivism.

Logical positivism is the name given to the philosophical and scientific positions of the Vienna Circle. This group of mathematicians and philosophers began meeting informally in 1907, and continued publishing until the mid-1930s (Passmore 1967). They attempted to set scientific standards for all significant truth statements in science and assumed that the essence of the concept of scientific knowledge itself was understood (Mish'alani 1988). There are four key assumptions in the foundational approach of logical positivism regarding the relationship of truth statements in empirical analytic science to the existence of an objective pre-existing uninterpreted reality. These four assumptions are crucial to understanding the critique of foundationalism by critical social theory which was extended by postmodern philosophers.

The first assumption is the existence of a *foundation* of un- or pre-interpreted facts in an objectively real world that are available to people through sense perception. Second, it is assumed that there is direct correspondence between our sense perceptions and these absolutely true (and accessible) facts. Third, it is assumed that fact and value are separate notions independent of one another and that empirical analytic science can deal only with facts without also dealing with values. Fourth, the process of empirical analytic science, dealing only with true facts, can therefore discern the philosophical essence of concepts and their relationships, such as the causal relationship (Held 1980).

On the basis of these foundational assumptions, logical positivism, as described by the writings of the authors of the Vienna Circle, claimed complete value-freedom for the empirical analytic tradition, also called the scientific method. These assumptions were used to construct a position from which to provide value-free critique of other, competing views. Logical positivism assumes the existence of a transcendental independent basis for the evaluation of competing truth claims. Assuming the existence of bare facts also allows an independent basis to which to appeal in distinguishing between theoretical and empirical claims. From such a value-free perspective, any research tradition that does not base claims on these bare facts can be rejected as illegitimate or irrational.

On the basis of these foundational assumptions, logical positivism claimed that human rationality is limited to the empirical analytic scientific method and denied to all other discourses such as ethics and aesthetics. Science, in this view, is the only mode in which reality can be rationally presented (Held 1980). It follows that philosophy and ethics have no basis to critique scientific claims because these disciplines admit value judgments, whereas empirical analytic science does not.

It should be noted that there are critical theorists who deny the value-neutrality of the empirical analytic tradition without rejecting the existence of bare facts (for example, see Althusser 1971). In general, however, the critical theorists rejected the assumptions of foundationalism as described by the logical positivists of the Vienna Circle as the basis for the empirical analytic method.

Others applied foundational assumptions to the human sciences or social sciences. It was argued that these disciplines could be viewed as evolving towards true scientific status on the model of the natural sciences. Critical theorists, however, argued against the assumptions of logical positivism and the extension of these assumptions to the social sciences. Foucault, for example, 'was critical of the human sciences as a dubious and dangerous attempt to model a science of human beings on the natural sciences' (Dreyfus 1987: 311).

The critical theorists of the Frankfurt School demonstrated convincingly that foundational claims to true knowledge were not value-free, but were clearly tied to certain social projects, values, interests, genders, races, classes and agendas. They argued that western science had become socially engaged and politically powerful despite (or possibly because of) the claim to value-freedom (Seidman and Wagner 1992). The critical theorists were indeed skeptical of the existence of any facts purported to lack value and ideological components (Street 1992).

The critical theorists argued that in the name of the foundational assumption of the value-freedom of science, one certain set of unacknowledged, unstated and unexamined values had achieved precedence above all others without being subjected to analysis by its own criteria. This set of values includes those of prediction, control, standardization, exploitation and efficiency. It has been more recently argued that enlightenment naiveté in asserting the ability of science to produce value-free truths by value-free methods has failed (Seidman and Wagner 1992). In other words, the foundational approach of the empirical analytic tradition as described by the logical positivists is an ideology.

Critical theorists argued that the assumption that fact and value can be separated implies that dealing only with facts is *better* than dealing with values because facts provide what is assumed to be an independent basis for distinguishing between theory and truth. This assumption also implies that dealing only with facts will produce outcomes for human beings that are better than outcomes produced by dealing with facts that have a value component. Since foundationalism regards the world as a domain of neutral objects, foundational science is therefore prevented from examining itself as anything other than another neutral object, i.e. without self-interest, or social origin, or values (Held 1980). Foundational science thus submits every activity to causal analysis except its own (Allen 1992).

In a crucial theoretical move, the critical theorists pointed out that the ideals of objectivity, efficiency, prediction, control, and value-freedom are themselves values. The notion that a true judgment (given that there is such a thing) is better than a false one is itself an evaluative statement (Held 1980: 171). If science is indeed free of values, it follows that science is also free of

ideological consequences. The assumption of value-freedom thus necessarily excludes inquiry into the possibility of the operation within science of systematic oppression through ideological means. Foundationalism thereby excludes consideration of the possibility that things might, under different circumstances, be different from how they are presently described by the scientific method (Seidman 1992: 173). This is to say that logical positivist-based empirical analytic science excludes from rational inquiry the possibility of different meanings being attached to actions by people other than the meanings that are constructed by scientific activity.

In order to avoid the possibility of multiple interpretations, which would tend to destabilize the concepts under scrutiny, the meaning of concepts and methods in foundational science become reified. Methodological traditions are held apart from critique based on standards of ethical preferability, even when it has become apparent that they embody ideological deception and distortion (Seidman 1992: 173) and result in oppression.

Foundationalism therefore reduces the concept of human agency to that of support or carrier of objective, measurable, value-free general social structures (Leonard 1990). The critical theorists, however, pointed out that individuals can influence, are influenced by, social structures. Seidman (1992), for example, observes the powerful effect of foundational science on people. Seidman (1992: 64) argues that foundational science 'promotes the intellectual obscurity and social irrelevance of theory, contributes to the decline of public morale and political discourse, and furthers the enfeeblement of an active citizenry'. Empirical analytic science applied to human beings is, therefore, an oppressive ideology.

Certainly human behavior has indeed become regularized, predictable, controllable and describable using sophisticated probability statistics and statistical modeling (Held 1980). Under these conditions, social action does indeed appear to be governed by natural causal structures. But the use by the social sciences of the same approach found in the natural sciences on the facts of social life demonstrate an ironic truth. Instead of making the idea of human agency the subject of critical reflection, foundational methods tend to reify the structured consciousness of their constructed object. The observable is taken to be the only possibility, resulting in loss of context, history, possibility, and situatedness.

Foundationalism has provided an extremely useful method to support technical and causal explanations for phenomena in the natural world. It is noted that what counts as the natural world, however, is itself an ideological decision, and should be recognized as such (Street 1992). Technical reasoning is not problematic in itself. The problem is its use as a model for all valid knowledge, and its categorical elimination of critique from any other perspective.

The foundational perspective survives in the natural sciences and the social sciences in various forms despite its widely acknowledged difficulties. The logical positivists were ultimately unable to determine the meaning of meaning, unable to define the essence of the concepts of verification, evidence, scientific explanation, and analysis, and unable to establish the *a priori* nature of mathematics and logic (Mish'alani 1988: 4). The critique of

foundationalism by the critical social theorists is shared by discourse analysis and other interpretive methodologies. Hybrids are also beginning to form (Denzin 1997; Denzin and Lincoln 2000).

## **5. Postmodernism**

Another important influence on discourse analysis is the postmodern perspective. Postmodern theorists criticized the critical social theorists with regard to their notion of transcendental concepts and the role of theory building. A modernist approach to science is one that assumes certain transcendental notions as a basis for theorizing. Foundational science is modernist in that the assumptions include such transcendental notions as the existence of bare facts and the 'epistemological superiority of science as a mode of knowledge' (Seidman 1992: 59).

Postmodernism, on the other hand, rejects totalizing narratives and universal reified concepts (even such concepts as domination or emancipation) in favor of situated accounts of a more local nature. It is an openly moral analysis that seeks to analyze specific contextual power relations by observing the processes of meaning-making that function within specific situations. Instead of analyzing the reified concepts illuminated by the process of the discourse, postmodernism analyzes the process itself.

Critical social theory has been called modernist by Leonard (1990) despite its critique of foundationalism because while it criticizes the transcendental notions of science, it makes use of other transcendental notions of its own. For example, critical social theory, while critical of the empirical analytic notion of a foundation of unassailable true facts, assumes other notions to be universal, a-historical, and transcendental. For example, critical social theory assumes that the notions of oppression and emancipation are real in the same sense as the notion of the existence of true facts.

Leonard (1990) supports the claim that critical social theory is modernist with an important piece of evidence. Critical theorists believe that notions found in some non-dominant discourses of modernity (such as Marxism) are sources of change strategies that apply to all human beings. The critical theorists criticized Marxist theory for universalizing emancipatory interest (and locating it in the proletariat) when they in fact committed a similar error themselves, by insisting that their claims about more general domination, communication, and rationality had to be transcendental to be valid (Leonard 1990). Critical theory can, therefore, be viewed as another inquiry claiming universal truths from an unacknowledged situated position, and therefore having the potential for unintended ideological consequences (Aronowitz 1992).

On the positive side, modernism provided the important emphasis on historicity, possibility and contextuality that was extended even further by the postmodernists, including discourse analysts. Instead of criticizing society from universal norms, postmodernists criticize universal norms from their context-specific social base (Alexander, 1992: 343). The postmodernist position 'reconsider[s] the relationship between scientific knowledge, power and society as well as the relation between science, critique, and narrative'

(Seidman and Wagner 1992: 2). Methodologically, 'postmodernists prefer local stories to general ones, but do not necessarily reject methodologically sophisticated and analytically informed social analysis but rather invoke a suspicion regarding claims that social inquiry can be grounded in some way that gives it a privileged epistemological status' (Nicholson 1992). Postmodernists like Foucault are more likely to *do history* instead of theory building, and to view moral and political concerns as central issues but not as transcendently valid reified entities (Seidman and Wagner 1992).

The postmodern tradition is described as narrative with moral intent (Seidman 1992: 47). Postmodern discourse analysts refuse legitimation of research traditions in the social sciences that are based on discussions of truth. Instead, the postmodern approach seeks to expand the numbers of people who may participate, since the intent is practical. Local narratives claim to analyze social situations (AIDS, homelessness, terrorism) in a particular social setting, while viewing the power relations inherent in the situation from a historical standpoint, in present circumstances, and for future possibilities (Seidman 1992: 73).

## **6. Foucault**

Michel Foucault participated in the postmodernist extension of the critical social theorists' critique of the application of empirical analytic science to the human sciences. The emphasis in Foucault's later work is on the concept of power in specific local human situations. Foucault's work was also significantly influenced by Wittgenstein and Nietzsche, as described below.

Any body of knowledge or discipline in the human sciences that claims to produce definitions in its own area of expertise, is today faced with the observation that so-called empirical definitions change historically and discontinuously; that they do not reflect transcendental or universal subjects, meanings, structures, realities, or processes (Allen 1986). Accordingly, Wittgenstein argued for treating all philosophical problems as manifestations of tensions between and within intra- and interdisciplinary discursive practices. According to Wittgenstein, philosophical issues should be understood as tensions between discursive practices, without demands for definitions or essences. Analysis of issues becomes a description of the discursive tensions in all of their concreteness and situatedness (Mish'alani 1988: 4).

Foucault's work was not only influenced by this notion of the historical aspect of definitions and definition-producing discourse from Wittgenstein, but also the historical and power components of definitions from Nietzsche. For Nietzsche, an attempt at redefinition is seen as a strategy for access to hegemony or dominance of one discourse over others (Mish'alani 1988). The act of defining or re-defining something thus constitutes a move of power. The importance of power for Nietzsche was also reflected in Foucault's work.

Nietzsche argued that current use of any concept consists of historical conglomerates, borrowings, dominations, shifts, displacements, transpositions, and impositions (Mish'alani 1988: 9). This swirling, mix of threads in any discourse or body of knowledge can be patiently unwound in an



analysis that Nietzsche called a genealogy. Following Nietzsche, Foucault agreed that any attempt at analysis must be considered another interpretation or domination, and also used the term *genealogy*.

For Foucault, it followed that discourse cannot be analyzed only in the present, because the power components and the historical components create such a tangled knot of shifting meanings, definitions and interested parties over periods of time. Consequently, a discourse analysis must be seen at the same time from a genealogical perspective in Nietzsche's sense, a power-analytic in Nietzsche's sense, and another historically situated, tension-analyzing discourse in Wittgenstein's sense.

Foucault claimed that power relations in modern western civilization can be represented as resulting from several key conceptual changes in social thought beginning around the 17th century (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1983). The development of the physical sciences, the industrial revolution, and the rise of capitalist nation-states took place at the same time that philosophers were describing what was called the humanist perspective. These well documented changes were accompanied, according to Foucault, by a gradual and generally unrecognized change in the management of people. Together, these reconceptualizations have reframed our modern assumptions concerning power, society, science and the notion of human agency.

The emergence of the physical sciences freed our understanding of the physical world from traditional conceptualizations bound by religion and superstition. Concomitantly, the emergence of a philosophical perspective called humanism emphasized the liberty, equality, and fraternity of human beings (or at least a select group of people *defined* as human beings by those in positions of power). This philosophical orientation was contrasted with the traditional beliefs about people that held under religious monarchies.

The best-documented change in western civilization during this time was the Industrial Revolution and the concurrent rise of capitalist economies. The mobilization of large groups of trained workers as a labor resource for capitalist economies became important for successful competition between nations. Continuity of this system requires stable groups of trained people that are reproduced in sufficient numbers. Capitalist economies are disrupted by large-scale migration, widespread famine or disease, and long-term warfare.

The gradual and steady replenishment of a docile and stable work force is therefore crucial to the emerging capitalist nation-state. Capitalism requires at least minimally trained people for industrial labor. People in the work force are not as interchangeable as they were in feudal economies. Technical advice for the influence and control of individual human bodies, and concern with the health, stability and reproduction of workers became crucial to the success of capitalism.

The above three conceptual changes are considered critical by Foucault to understanding modern western civilization. Foucault adds another important change of perspective that has played a role in the determination of what modern life is like for those of us who live in it. Besides empirical analytic science, humanism, and capitalism, Foucault provides evidence for a shift in

the conceptualization of power. Discourse analysis receives its impetus to describe power relations from Foucault's description.

Several concepts organize Foucault's perspective and are important to understand when considering discourse analysis. These key concepts are power (also called bio-power in order to emphasize the important role of biology), resistance, the body, social science, social agents, and the medicalization and clinicalization of social control (Powers 2003). These concepts exist at the societal level, according to Foucault, where they have come to function as cultural myths, ideologies or unacknowledged assumptions. Together, these concepts inform what Foucault calls a strategy that imparts direction to the micropractices of everyday life, as well as influencing larger social goals. Foucault calls this strategy bio-power or disciplinary power, or power/knowledge. I will describe the notions of power and resistance below.

Disciplinary power or power/knowledge or bio-power is concerned with the production of willing and able bodies that support the status quo of power relations, such as the economic system of capitalism. Foucault claims that the modern representation of power began as a mode of inquiry to answer specific questions about how to control people in certain specific situations.

Before the seventeenth century, control of the minute details of human life had only taken place under extraordinary circumstances such as during outbreaks of plague, when, for example, people were confined to their houses in the evening and physically counted by appointed citizens of the area. Around the seventeenth century, these successful measures of control were revisited and revised to meet new challenges in people control arising from the influence of capitalism and humanism. Applying the newly developed methods that were so successful in the physical sciences to problems concerning human beings generated by the rise of capitalism resulted in what is now called the social sciences. Foucault uses the terms *disciplinary technology*, *power/knowledge* and *human sciences* to refer to the social sciences in a manner that emphasizes the aspect of control of human beings adapted from the physical sciences.

Foucault claims that the conceptualization of power in modern society that has evolved from these developments in human rationality has become the assumed framework for understanding the notion of progress in western civilization. First developed and refined through specific practices applied to limited situations such as prisons and boarding schools, power and control practices became successful strategies applied in other situations such as law enforcement, hospitals and schools. Discourse concerning how to build a better prison, how to enforce better military discipline, and how to build schools and hospitals was directed toward making them more efficient and therefore more successful. The same approach that emphasizes control was also applied to the education of children, the conduct of police, and the rules of order for large gatherings. These are all examples of the empirical analytic approach to social order that have this common ancestry or genealogy.

These specific discourses of control were not discussed or debated as specific philosophies or theories. Instead, the discourses referred only to specific concrete situations, e.g. How should we build prisons so that we can see every

inmate separately but prevent them from knowing when it is that they are being watched? The work of the social sciences is carried out by members of the social disciplines educated within the framework of each discipline such as law enforcement, health care, sociology, psychology, etc. The underlying and unaddressed order and control assumptions common to all of the social disciplines share the ancestry of the successful control of physical phenomena. Empirical analytic science became the method used to secure the goals of capitalism.

## **7. Power**

The notion of power, also termed *biopower*, is the most important notion in Foucault's work because it forms the basis for the analysis of discourse. The main exposition of the notion of power is found in *The History of Sexuality, Volume One, Introduction* (1978) and this description is mainly drawn from that account.

First, power must be understood as a network of interacting forces that are goal-driven, relational, and self-organized. Power creates tensions between, within, and among individuals or groups. Power is not understood as a singular, unidirectional, reified phenomenon with identifiable instances of application and it is not necessarily viewed as a strategy consciously used by some people over other people. Social life is viewed as a web of shifting power relations influenced by micropolitics instead of brute physical force.

Second, power is a process that operates in continuous struggles and confrontations that change, strengthen, or reverse the polarity of the force relations between power and resistance. This means that power is described as a relational process that is embodied in context-specific situations and is partially identifiable through its ideological effects on the lives of people.

Third, power is the support that the force relations or tensions find in one another, forming a web or system of interacting influences. For example, the domination of patriarchy is partially sustained by the definition of women as not-men. In other words, each is necessary to the other and each one is defined in terms of the other. Concepts constitute and are constituted by each other.

Fourth, power is the tension of the inherently contradictory relations between power and resistance. In other words, power can be partially described by the conflicting goals and objectives of power and resistance. This tension can only be described in specific terms relative to people in that situation, and not in general terms that apply to other times and places.

Fifth, power is known from the strategies and practices in and through which the force relations take effect. One example of strategies and practices is the process of marginalization. Marginalization is the process by which non-dominant discourses are not eliminated, but tolerated as alternative speaking positions of resistance that provide the target and therefore the tension to sustain the dominant discourse. This process is necessary because power and resistance are defined in relation to one another. The institutional manifestations of these strategies and practices of power may be found in

bureaucracy, law, and various social hegemonic discourses such as science, medicine, and education. Power is not an ideology in Althusser's sense (1971), although ideology can be said to be one of the strategies seen within individual instances of domination in power relations.

Power is not a group of institutions, or a structure, or a set of mechanisms that ensures the subservience of citizens. Power is not a mode of subjugation functioning by rules instead of by violence. Instead, power functions through strategies and practices without conscious direction. Here Foucault means to distinguish his notion of power from the juridico-discursive notion of power prevalent in western philosophy and based on a notion of a democratically defined person with basic human rights in a sovereign-subject relation (Mish'alani 1988).

Power is not a physical strength we are endowed with in some essentialist manner. Power does not mean a general system of domination by one group over another. In fact, Foucault emphasizes that situations of domination are embodied as much within the dominators as the oppressed. These individual instances of power usually called domination or oppression are effects, or terminal forms of power, points in the web or grid of power relations.

Power is not a negative restraint on truth or the rights of individuals or groups as it is conceptualized in the juridico-discursive view. Instead, power is *productive* of truth, rights, and the conceptualization of individuals, through the processes, or discursive practices of the human sciences and other major discourses such as social sciences, bureaucracy, medicine, law and education. In the juridico-discursive view, all power rests on the use of, or the threat of, violence. In this view, non-violence cannot be considered powerful because it is defined in terms of its opposite, violence, which is the only basis for power (Schell 2003). On the contrary, Schell's analysis shows that non-violence is as productive a force as violence. Education within dominant discourses produces social agents who assume that only scientific bodies of knowledge produce value-free truth, which advances western civilization by increasing the efficient management of human life and produces measurable outcomes.

There is no central point from which all power emanates. Instead, power consists of a continually shifting web or grid of individual positions of tension between power and resistance. Because of the inequality of the tension, local and unstable states of power and resistance are constantly being created, dissolved, reversed and reshuffled. Power is omnipresent not because it consolidates everything as arising from a unified source. It is omnipresent because it is continually produced in every relation from one moment to the next, in one situation to the next, between and among people in specific situations.

Power has a different complex strategic existence in the context of each particular manifestation. This strategic existence may be analyzed in its local effects without claims for universal application. Instead, the local strategy is described in terms of the local effects of domination on the individuals and groups involved. For example, the existence of power in an individual case of gender relations (i.e. a heterosexual marriage) may be analyzed in terms of the limits that are placed on the actions of one or both of the participants.

Foucault sometimes refers to power as power/knowledge, because in discourse power and knowledge are joined together in relation to resistance. Discourse may, therefore, be both an instrument and an effect of both power and resistance. It transmits and produces power, but also can undermine and expose it. Similarly, positions of silence can enact power, but can also loosen the hold of power and provide obscure areas of tolerance for resistance. The most important level of analysis for power relations is at the level of micropractices, the everyday activities of life, the terminal points of the grid or web.

From this description of Foucault's approach to the subject of power, certain conclusions follow:

1. Power is not a reified finite entity that is acquired, seized or shared. It is not something that someone can hold on to or allow to slip away. It is *embodied* or *performed* through the interplay of non-equal and changing relations of force in a specific context.
2. Power does not exist apart from economic relations, political relations, knowledge relations, or sexual relations, but is inherent in them. Power is the immediate embodied effect of divisions and inequalities as they occur in context. Power has a direct productive role in these relations.
3. Power is not the institutionalized conflict between authorities and target groups. It does not proceed only in a top down fashion. It functions in bureaucracy, in families, groups, nations, institutions, discourses and relationships. Larger scale lines of force are sometimes created out of the conglomeration of points in the power web that can link them together and bring about redistributions. Major domination is the effect that is sustained when points in the grid are consolidated. Examples of these kinds of major dominations are described by Marxism and feminism with regard to class and gender, respectively.
4. Power relations are not intentional. There may be directions to the lines of force, but the strategies are not necessarily planned to create oppression of specific people or groups. If power relations are understandable, it is not because they are an example of something that explains or predicts them, but because they have common goals and objectives. These goals and objectives are only rarely identifiable as related to power. More often than not, the goals and objectives are specified with respect to micro-practices and have power effects as unintended consequences. The goal of nursing to empower patients is justified by reference to patient outcomes. The methods and strategies of empowerment are not intentionally designed to produce power for the nurse, but the ends justify the means and the unintended consequence is the creation of a dependent patient and a nurse with power/knowledge (Powers 2003).

Therefore, it cannot be said that power relations necessarily result from the choice or decision of an individual person or group of people. In fact, Foucault argues that modern power is not some sort of conspiracy set up with respect to specific goals of control. He calls his conceptualization of power a strategy without a strategist because though it provides direction

for the ordering of power/knowledge, no organized body of knowledge can be said to have originated the strategy.

The logic, order, or strategy of power is characterized by practices that often seem quite explicit at a restricted level, such as the design of classrooms with the teacher in front and the students facing forward. The logic of the system can be analyzed, and the aims can be completely understandable, and yet no one can be said to have specifically designed the logic to be oppressive. The overall strategy was constructed historically, but not intentionally.

5. Wherever there is power, there is resistance that is implicit to the situation.

## **8. Resistance**

Resistance plays the role of adversary, target and support for power. Power and resistance both constitute and are constituted by each other. They are each defined by reference to one another. Thus power and resistance are found together in all points of the web of power relations. The diversity of resistances is each a special case in relation to domination in that situation.

Resistance, like power, can coalesce to form large rebellions or radical ruptures such as the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s in the U.S. Resistance can also remain isolated in specific circumstances such as one workplace. Resistance works against power and can shift the tensions and create new alliances and fractures. Resistance can also be co-opted, or absorbed, by power in any force relation. Co-optation of resistance results in the increase of power and the reduction or fracturing of the resistance. An example of co-optation can be found in the absorption of doctors of osteopathy into the medical model.

Foucault's notion of the power was influenced by 'Nietzsche's genealogy of the way power uses the illusion of meaning to further itself' (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1983: xxvii). Nietzsche's work demonstrated how power creates the illusion of meaning to support control strategies without the necessity of an appeal to the notion of an organized conspiracy.

As a consequence of the notions of power and resistance, we can see that technical, instrumental, means-end reasoning has been raised to the level of a social principle (Aronowitz 1992: 302). Radical ideas that advocate resistance to the scientific management of everyday life are not restricted but remain unheeded, because they seem illogical, irrational, nonsensical, disorderly, and uncivilized. Rejecting science is widely believed to be rejecting rationality. Modern human beings feel more and more coerced and controlled but have no discernable target to which to respond (Crossley 2002).

## **9. Discourse analysis**

The various methodological variants of discourse analysis build on the philosophical foundations described above. Students of the method need a thorough grounding in these foundations before attempting to perform a

discourse analysis because, as with many other qualitative methods, the researcher is the tool (Denzin and Lincoln 2000). Foucaultian discourse analysis can be used to explore the power relations and power effects inherent in discourses within many disciplines and in popular culture. Using related conceptualizations of the body, the role of confession, the processes of medicalization and clinicalization of social control, and the role of science and social agents (Powers 2003) discourse analysts need to be aware of the conceptualizations of power and resistance in order to be able to recognize them within a discourse. For example, recognizing the discourse of risk within discussions of tattooing in prisons cannot be accomplished without knowing how people use the concept of risk.

The method of discourse analysis is applicable to many situations in nursing. As a method of inquiry, discourse analysis has the potential to inform nursing research and nursing practice. An increased awareness and understanding of power and oppression in nursing discourses could result from the use of discourse analysis to analyze common as well as relatively obscure discourses in our discipline.

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