

PERCEIVING GENDER THROUGH FRAMEWORKS OF POWER

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QUESTION AND METHOD

- Do people understand gender through frameworks of power? If so, which frameworks?
- Method
 - 10 semi-structured interviews
- Participants:
 - Ohio Wesleyan juniors and seniors
 - All four academic divisions—Arts, Humanities, Natural Sciences, and Social Sciences—included
 - Variety of involvement with gender activism
 - Multiple genders

FINDINGS

- Majority of the sample (5+/10) describe power as...
 - Coercion or control
 - Related to fear
 - Agency
 - Domain specific
 - Restriction
 - Operating at multiple levels of analysis

OPERATES AT MULTIPLE LEVELS

Individual, relational, and contextual

“I’ve heard women say ‘well, I do not need feminism because I am equal.’ Let’s assume that is true for a minute. That’s good for you, stereotypical white, middle class, able-bodied girl...Sarah, Helen, Barbara, whoever. Even if you are good, until all women are good like you’re good, we still need feminism. There are different levels of looking at this; it’s not just about you as the individual.”

Traditional Gender Stereotypes.

Feminine.

*Not aggressive.
Dependent.
Easily influenced.
Submissive.
Passive.
Home-oriented.
Easily hurt emotionally.
Indecisive.
Talkative.
Gentle.
Sensitive to other's feelings.
Very desirous of security.
Cries a lot.
Emotional.
Verbal.
Kind.
Tactful.
Nurturing.*

Masculine.

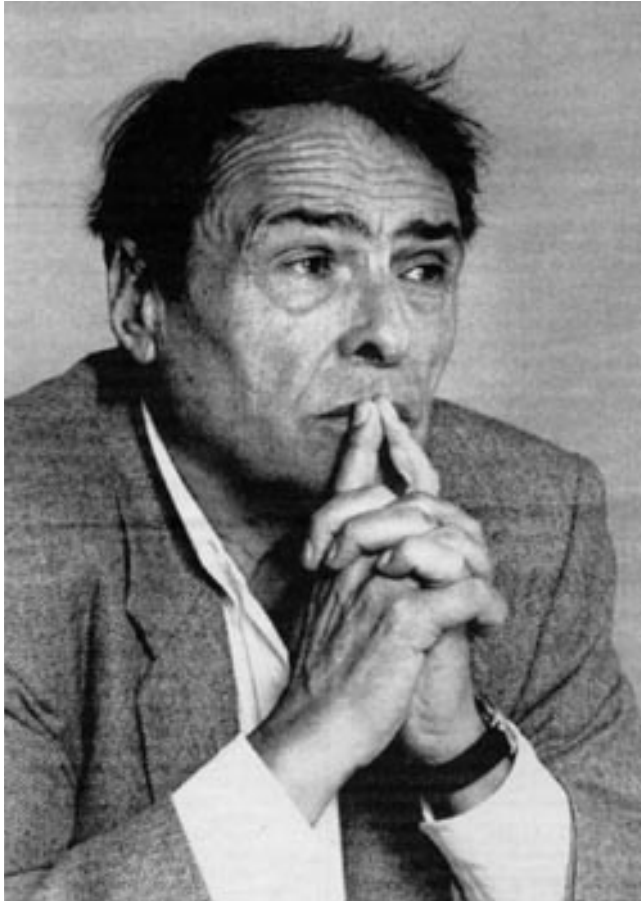
*Aggressive.
Independent.
Not easily influenced.
Dominant.
Active.
Worldly.
Not easily hurt emotionally.
Decisive.
Not at all talkative.
Tough.
Less sensitive to other's feelings.
Not very desirous of security.
Rarely cries.
Logical.
Analytical.
Cruel.
Blunt.
Not nurturing.*

RESTRICTION

- “If women are strong and independent, we are called [derogatory names], but if we are sweet and kind and dainty, we can’t get anywhere...it is limiting.”
- “Men are confined. Like, I like being a man, but it is rigid. Don’t cry. Act tough. Play sports. Make money. It’s a lot to do and deal with on a constant basis.”

EMPOWERMENT AND AGENCY

- “People need to be able to choose...who they want to be and have that agency.”
- “[Feminism] is empowering, isn’t it? There is so much out of my control in this world, and I can’t control how others treat me or think about me, but I can control how I think, so I will.”
- “People have the power to make their lives what they want them to be. Blaming your gender on whether or not you get what you want seems like a cop out. You’ve got to take it on yourself.”



A RETURN TO THEORY: BOURDIEU

- QUESTION: Do people understand gender through frameworks of power? If so, which frameworks?
- Bourdieu approaches power within the context of a comprehensive theory of society. Bourdieu sees power as culturally and symbolically created, and constantly re-legitimized through agency and structure.

KEY IDEAS

- Power is an ideology, not a simple fact.
- Understanding why people think certain things or come to certain conclusions builds empathy, allowing us to have important conversations.
- Themes:
 - Control
 - Restriction
 - Agency
 - Related to fear
 - Domain specific
 - Multilevel

QUESTIONS