**Power is Everywhere: Social Inequality**

**From Discursive Formations to Patterns of Activation**

Kathleen Cole

Ph.D. Candidate

Department of Political Science

University of California, Santa Barbara

**This paper is a work-in-progress. Please do not circulate.**

During the second half of the twentieth-century, researchers across a number of academic disciplines became interested in identifying the ways in which socialization and social learning influences the kinds of persons we become and in large part determines the structure of our interactions with one another. Scholars in sociology, anthropology, philosophy, cultural studies, feminist studies, race and ethnic studies and psychology began thinking about social life and human behavior in terms of social constructions.[[1]](#footnote--1) During the social constructivist zeitgeist, two particularly important and productive developments emerged: Foucauldian analysis and the social cognition approach to social psychology. Both have become influential social constructivist approaches within their fields and have served as the foundations for much of the subsequent research by many others in their disciplines.[[2]](#footnote-0)

For Foucault and those employing Foucauldian analysis as their theoretical approach, social constructivism begins with a focus on language. Foucauldian inquiry is grounded in questions about the ways in which our experiences are mediated by language, such as: how do we divide up the continuous world of sensory experience and what is the significance of our classification schemes? Foucauldian inquiry also poses questions about the kind of selves we become as a result of our dividing practices and the internalization of discourse, such as: how do we become particular kinds of selves and what can we know about ourselves and others? For Foucauldians, understanding the social construction of selves requires attention to the ways in which we use language to describe and divide our world.

Social cognition research is animated by a different, yet related, set of questions. Like Foucault, social cognition researchers are interested in discovering the ways in which social learning and social interaction influences the kinds of selves we become. In their research, they take up the questions: What kind of selves are we? How do we learn to think categorically about our selves and others? And, how do we employ that knowledge once we have acquired it? Answering these larger questions required the development of theories of attention, perception, encoding, and retrieval, as well as the motivated cognitive processes that guide our thinking.

Although these two strands of research developed separately from one another, they share in common some foundational claims. First, they agree that selves are socially, interactionally, and relationally constructed. The self is not essential nor inherent in the person. Instead, the self develops over time as a function of its embeddedness in a social/linguistic environment and through interaction with social others. Second, Foucauldians and social cognition researchers agree that ways of thinking are culturally specific and vary over time. That is, patterns of thought and cognitive strategies are social products. To be a member of a society is to learn the ways of speaking and thinking specific to that spatio-temporal location. Thus, Foucauldian and social cognition research both begin from social constructivist assumptions.

Furthermore, both Foucauldian and social cognition researchers are centrally concerned with the ways in which we think categorically about people. Foucauldian social and political theorists tend to focus their attention on the roles that discourses and institutions play in designating and describing social groups. Foucauldian scholars tend to focus their attention on the social and structural forces through which socialization occurs and identities are constructed. Conversely, social cognition researchers pay considerably less attention to the ways in which categories are established through social construction processes and instead focus their attention on the ways in which category knowledge, once acquired, is utilized in our thinking about social others. Although they differ with respect to the phenomena they seek to describe, both Foucauldian social and political theorists and social cognitive psychologists are fundamentally concerned with the way in which categorical thinking about people shapes our identities and cognitive processing.

Finally, Foucauldian theorists and social cognition researchers are similarly interested in the way in which power operates through the construction of social categories and the deployment of social group stereotypes. For both Foucault and social cognition researchers, understanding the maintenance of social hierarchies requires that we analyze the workings of power. While scholars in both research areas agree that attending to the workings of power is necessary for social justice work, both Foucauldian theorists and social cognitive psychologists offer only partial analyses of the workings of power. Foucauldian theorists focus their attention on the discursive and institutional levels, identifying the ways in which power circulates and operates through discourse and institutions and contributes to the social construction of groups, categories, and identities. Social cognition researchers focus on the way in which power operates at the cognitive level. Their attention is focused on the ways in which power encourages the use of stereotypes when thinking about social others. Thus, both Foucauldians and social cognitive psychologists analyze the workings of power, but at different registers.

In this chapter, I consider whether Foucauldian social and political theory and social cognition research can be brought together to explain the persistence of social hierarchy and inequality at the discursive, institutional, and cognitive levels. To answer this question, I begin by considering the significance of power in both Foucauldian analysis and social cognition research for thinking categorically about others. Interestingly, for both Foucault and social cognition researchers “power is everywhere” active in maintaining social categories, hierarchies, and exclusions.[[3]](#footnote-1) In this chapter, I offer an account of the meaning and significance of the phrase “power is everywhere,” for both Foucault and social cognition researchers Don Operario, Stephanie A. Goodwin, and Susan Fiske. After explaining the divergent meanings of the phrase, I consider the compatibility of the two usages. Next, I offer an integration of Foucauldian analysis with social cognitive theory that moves from discursive formations to patterns of activation to explain the ongoing maintenance of social inequality. By bringing together these two research streams, I hope to demonstrate the way in which power relations shape who we are at the most fundamental, cognitive level.

**Foucault and Power:**

In his middle works, Foucault was centrally concerned with reconceptualizing power.[[4]](#footnote-2) Prior to his work, power was frequently conceived as a resource or possession subject to exchange. With Foucault’s theorization, power became dynamic. Power after Foucault was understood to be implicated in knowledge, productive of identities, imbued in all of our relationships. For Foucault, the claim that power is everywhere is a reflection of the dynamic, multidimensional character of power as he understood it.[[5]](#footnote-3) In this section, I will offer an account of the multidimensional character of power as Foucault articulated it is his various middle-phase works in order to explain the Foucauldian meaning of the phrase, “power is everywhere.”

For Foucault, the claim that power is everywhere is reflective of the view that power permeates every aspect of our lives including what constitutes knowledge and the discourses that support knowledge claims. On his account, power is bound up with knowledge in a relationship of mutual constitution. In *Discipline and Punish*, he writes,

Perhaps we should abandon the old belief that power makes mad and that, by the same token, the renunciation of power is one of the conditions of knowledge. We should admit rather, that power produces knowledge (and not simply by encouraging it because it serves power or by applying it because it is useful); that power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations.[[6]](#footnote-4)

Here, Foucault argues that there is no knowledge that is objective or neutral, but instead what constitutes knowledge at any given time, in any given place is reflective of the power relations that are presently active in shaping social conditions. Truth is not something that emerges in some unmediated way from experience. Instead, what we can know, what is taken as truth, is produced by particular individuals, authorized by specific institutional arrangements, in conflict with other, potential knowledges. Out of the multiplicity of potential knowleges on a particular subject, Foucault points out, whatever knowledge is most compatible with prevailing power relations or best supports prevailing power relations becomes the authorized knowledge—the knowledge that is considered authoritative on the subject. Other potential knowledges become “subjugated knowledges,” marked as inferior and or even untrue due to their “particular, local, [or] regional” character vis-à-vis the “objective,” general character of authorized knowledge.[[7]](#footnote-5) In this way, power is everywhere present in what we know, what we can know, and where that knowledge comes from.

Just as knowledge depends upon power, power depends upon knowledge. Foucault explains,

in a society such as ours, but basically in any society, there are manifold relations of power which permeate, characterise, and constitute the social body, and these relations of power cannot themselves be established, consolidated, nor implemented without the production, accumulation, circulation, and functioning of a discourse. There can be no possible exercise of power without a certain economy of discourses of truth which operates through and on the basis of this association. We are subjected to the production of truth through power and we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth.[[8]](#footnote-6)

Here, Foucault explains, power depends upon discourse, in that discourses of truth both legitimate power relations and obscure their constructed, contingent qualities. Power relations are reinforced or reified by the circulation of discourses that proclaim the rightness or naturalness of the relations of power. Without a legitimating discourse, the operation of power would be bare—visible to all as a relation of force. Discourses of truth support power relations by creating a lens through which to view power relations as something given, natural, correct. In this way knowledges—the various discourses of truth—provide the foundation and a medium for the circulation of power.

For Foucault, power is everywhere in that power is also productive of identities. In *The History of Sexuality, Volume One*, Foucault illustrates the way in which the power/knowledge relationship results in the formation of new forms of identity based on dividing practices, through which the subject “is either divided inside himself or divided from others.”[[9]](#footnote-7) Using the example of the nineteenth century emergence of the category “homosexual,” Foucault demonstrates the way in which power and its attendant knowledges can be employed to create new “kinds” of humans. As laws were increasingly used to codify, regulate, and support heterosexual marriage, and with the rise of medical and psychiatric treatment of sexual “deviants,” individual human beings began to be divided and classified on the basis of their sexual pleasures. He writes,

This new persecution of the peripheral sexualities entailed an *incorporation of perversions* and a new *specification of individuals.* As defined by the ancient civil or canonical codes, sodomy was a category of forbidden acts; their perpetrator was nothing more than the juridical subject of them. The nineteenth-century homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life, a life form, and a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology. Nothing that went into his total composition was unaffected by his sexuality. It was everywhere present in him: at the root of all his action because it was their insidious and indefinitely active principle; written immodestly on his face and body because it was a secret that always gave itself away. We must not forget that the psychological, psychiatric, medical category of homosexuality was constituted from the moment it was characterized…less by a type of sexual relations than by a certain quality of sexual sensibility, a certain way of inverting the masculine and the feminine within oneself. Homosexuality appeared as one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed from the practice of sodomy onto a kind of interior androgeny, a hermaphrodism of the soul. The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species.[[10]](#footnote-8)

In this passage, Foucault describes the way in which the state, through the mechanism of law, and the medical community, through their methods of research and classification, create homosexuals as a kind of person. Prior to the nineteenth-century, persons indulged their pleasures. Some pleasures were accepted and others prohibited. However, people were not yet classified by their pleasures. Their pleasures were not yet thought to be connected to their physiological makeup. Legal knowledges about heterosexual marriage and medical knowledges about sexual deviance became the authorized knowledge about homosexuality because of their compatibility with and support of heteronormative power relations. These knowledges, through the circulation of a discourse on homosexuality, create the category of homosexual, and the persons to which it refers.

Power becomes productive of identities as persons take up the categories ascribed to them, as they internalize the meanings, values, and practices associated with their category membership as constructed through discourse.[[11]](#footnote-9) In doing so, however, he notes that those who take up marginalized identity schemes will generate their own “‘reverse’ discourse,” a discourse that challenges the accepted discourse, attempts to redefine the meanings, values, and practices associated with the identity scheme, and “demand[s] that [the identity scheme’s] legitimacy or ‘naturality’ be acknowledged, often in the same vocabulary, using the same categories” which have been used to marginalize or exclude the identity group members.[[12]](#footnote-10) For example, people have come to identify as homosexual, to cultivate homosexual neighborhoods or other communities, and to develop cultural practices and linguistic practices unique to their social group. People have not only come to identify as homosexuals, but also have demanded recognition and equal treatment *as homosexuals* in a heteronormative social environment. This example illustrates the way in which, for Foucault, our identities are discursively constructed. And the discourse through which our identities are constructed and reconstructed is the site of constant struggle and negotiation. Power is productive of identities in the way it operates through the struggle over the meanings, values, and practices associated with identity groups.

Furthermore, for Foucault, power is everywhere because it exists between us, in relationships of power and resistance that pervade the social world. He writes,

power must be understood in the first instance as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization; as the process which, through ceaseless struggles and confrontations, transforms, strengthens, or reverses them; as the support which these force relations find in one another, thus forming a chain or system, or on the contrary, the disjunctions and contradictions which isolate them from one another; and lastly, as the strategies in which they take effect, whose general design or institutional crystallization is embodied in the state apparatus, in the formulation of the law, in the various social hegemonies. Power’s condition of possibility…must not be sought in the primary existence of a central point, in a unique source of sovereignty from which secondary and descendent forms would emanate; it is the moving substrate of force relations which, by virtue of their inequality, constantly engender states of power, but the latter are always local and unstable. The omnipresence of power: not because it has the privilege of consolidating everything under its invincible unity, but because it is produced from one moment to the next, at every point, or rather in every relation from one point to another. Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere…[Power] is simply the over-all effect that emerges from all these mobilities…power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society.[[13]](#footnote-11)

Here, Foucault explains that all social relations—between persons and between people and institutions—are imbued with power relations. Wherever there are points of contact between persons, or between persons and institutions, power relations—which is to say, force relations—exist. Power exists in the spaces between us. It is present in all our interactions. Power, as it exists in power relations, is dynamic. Power is not permanently possessed by any one actor or institution. It cannot be protected or guarded. Rather, power is constantly in circulation—always in adjustment, as our interactions with one another take place in time.

Power exists in the relations between us and is inherently bound up with resistance. Foucault writes,

Now, the study of this micro-physics [of power] presupposes that the power exercised on the body is conceived not as a property, but as a strategy, that its effects of domination are attributed not to ‘appropriation’, but to dispositions, manoeuvres, tactics, techniques, functionings, that one should decipher in it a network of relations, constantly in tension, in activity, rather than a privilege that one might possess; that one should take as its model a perpetual battle rather than a contract regulating a transaction or the conquest of a territory. In short this power is exercised rather than possessed; it is not the ‘privilege’, acquired or preserved, of the dominant class, but the overall effect of its strategic positions—an effect that is manifested and sometimes extended by the position of those who are dominated. Furthermore, this power is not exercised simply as an obligation or a prohibition on those who ‘do not have it’; it invests them, is transmitted by them and through them; it exerts pressure upon them, just as they themselves, in their struggle against it, resist the grip it has on them. This means that these relations go right down to the depths of society, that they are not localized in the relations between the state and its citizens or on the frontier between classes and that they do not merely reproduce, at the level of individuals, bodies, gestures and behavior, the general form of law or government; that, although there is continuity…there is neither analogy nor homology, but a specificity of mechanism and modality. Lastly, they are not univocal, they define innumerable points of confrontation, focuses of instability, each of which has its own risks of conflict, of struggles, and of an at least temporary inversion of power relations.[[14]](#footnote-12)

In this passage, Foucault makes at least four important points about power, significant for my discussion here. First, power is always a relationship in tension. Wherever power is exercised, there is also resistance, or at the very least the possibility of resistance. Power relations may be relations of struggle between competing forces. Or, alternatively, a person may act to extend and support the power exercised on and through them. However, to the extent that power relations exist, there is always the potential for conflict between the exercise of power and resistance. Second, how effectively one can use power is in large part determined by their position within the field of power relations. Various social hierarchies and patterns of inclusion and exclusion contribute to persons’ ability to use power effectively and influence the strategies and tactics they employ in the exercise of power. People are differently positioned within the field of power relations, and that positionality affects their use of power as well as their methods and the effectiveness of their resistance to power. Third, the exercise of power is always strategic and the tactics persons employ in exercising power are constantly being adjusted as they react to changes within the field of power relations. Finally, power is always everywhere in the field of power relations. There is no position in the field that has absolutely no ability to exercise power/resistance. Power relations always contain within them the possibility of inversion and adjustment. As a result, power is present in each position or node within the network of power relations.

Thus, behind Foucault’s simple claim, “power is everywhere,” lies a complex and sophisticated conception of power as a dynamic, strategic, and active influence in human life and relations. For Foucault, power is everywhere, in that it is indicated in what we know, internalized in our identities, and infused in every social relationship. It is “transmitted by and through us.”[[15]](#footnote-13) It “goes right down into the depths of society.”[[16]](#footnote-14) Thus, Foucault’s claim that power is everywhere offers us significant insight into the mechanisms through which society is created and recreated, constructed and continually reconstructed. Although Foucault’s analysis of power helps us to better understand the workings of power in society, it leaves unaddressed the workings of power in subjectivity and the effect of power relations on the cognitive mechanisms through which we think. To address this gap in Foucault’s theorizing, I think it is useful to consider what the phrase “power is everywhere” means for researchers working at the cognitive level.

**Social Cognition, Stereotypes, and Power:**

For Don Operario, Stephanie A. Goodwin, and Susan T. Fiske, “power is everywhere” in that it is everywhere present and active in our categorical thinking about others. On their account, power is expressed in the categories we use in our thinking about others and the meanings ascribed to those categories. In addition, they argue, a person’s social location—i.e., in Foucauldian terms his position in the field of power relations—has a significant impact on his willingness to judge others on the basis of category membership and on the likelihood of explaining social inequality as a function of categorical differences among members of social groups. In their essay, “Power is Everywhere,” Operario and colleagues explain the ways in which social and interpersonal power relations affect us in our thinking categorically about others.

Operario and colleagues begin their account of power and its role in our social thinking by noting that stereotypes are both useful and necessary for us as perceivers in the social environment. Stereotypes are the result of categorical thinking. Whenever we think about a category of people, we employ stereotypes about those people. Stereotypes are the learned, commonly associated traits ascribed to various categories of people. Stereotypes are useful to us for the same reason that other types of categorical thinking are useful to us: they help us to make sense of the complex social world more efficiently by allowing us to group stimuli in the social environment into categories, rather than dealing with each stimulus individually. If I encounter an object that is recognizable as a hammer, but not identical with any other hammer I have seen before, I can still be reasonably confident about what the object is, its purpose, and how to use it. This is a valuable cognitive skill. For Operario and collagues, then, stereotypes do not always or necessarily have the negative connotations that the common usage of the term implies.

However, the authors note, stereotypes and categorical thinking affect some social groups in more damaging ways than others. They explain, “[a]lthough all individuals use stereotypes to simplify their social environment…*not all social categories suffer equally from the content of their groups’ stereotype*. The societal context determines both the evaluative content and the interpersonal or intergroup potency of cognitive simplifications.”[[17]](#footnote-15) That is, within a given social environment, groups are differently positioned vis-à-vis one another in terms of their ability to use power effectively. “Stereotypes that maintain social hegemony” are more likely to circulate and adversely affect the groups to which they refer because of the “[a]symmetrical power between individuals or groups,” which “grants those who control resources the ability to employ their stereotypes most often.”[[18]](#footnote-16) As a result, members of marginalized social categories or groups are most likely to suffer as a result of their social stereotypes, which “provide the ideological foundations for maintaining the status quo.”[[19]](#footnote-17) Thus, power is everywhere in that it is an active determinant of both the content of predominant social group stereotypes and the degree to which some stereotypes pervade the social environment.

In their research, Operario, Goodwin, and Fiske study the ways in which differently situated perceivers employ stereotypes in their thinking about social others. Specifically, they focus their research on the ways in which people in positions of social power and interpersonal power utilize stereotypes in thinking about social others and the motivations that underlie their cognitive processes. They find that at both the social and interpersonal levels, people who occupy positions of power are more likely to use stereotypes in their judgments of social others and more likely to explain social inequality as the result of the negative characteristics ascribed to the stereotyped group.

Operario and colleagues find that people who are members of privileged social groups (e.g., whites, males, heterosexuals, high socioeconomic status people, etc.), or high-power people “are more likely to use stereotypes than are low-power perceivers.”[[20]](#footnote-18) The authors explain,

Powerful perceivers tend to stereotypes others for three reasons: (a) not being outcome-dependent, they may lack the *need* to pay cognitively expensive, individuating attention to their social subordinates; (b) being structurally overloaded, they may lack the mental *resources*, spent elsewhere, to allocate individuating attention to their social subordinates; and (c) to the extent that they are individually oriented to dominance, they may lack the *desire* to perceive their social subordinates as individuated beings, preferring instead to categorize.[[21]](#footnote-19)

Note here that individual motivation *to stereotype* is a significant influence on stereotyping behavior. For a variety of reasons—cognitive laziness, cognitive busyness, or self-enhancement—people in high-power social positions often *prefer* stereotypical thinking about people in low-power positions.

High-power individuals’ preference for stereotyping non-dominant group members increases as a function of identification with the high-power social group and under circumstances of perceived threat. Operario and colleagues explain, “perceivers who categorize themselves as members of a social group tend to assume the cognitive and attitudinal inclinations of that group.” As a result, people “who identify themselves with high-power hegemonic groups are therefore likely to think, feel, and act in ways that maintain and benefit their groups’ integrity and status.”[[22]](#footnote-20) Thus, in order to bolster their own social position, members of dominant groups are likely to think about non-dominant group members through negative social stereotypes that support their dominant position. The authors note that this “tendency increases under conditions of perceived threat or resource scarcity.”[[23]](#footnote-21) As a result, when dominant groups are asked to explain inequality—to explain the social origins of the unequal relations of power from which they benefit—dominant group members are most likely to justify their privilege at others expense in terms of the negative characteristics ascribed to non-dominant group members in their negative group stereotypes. The authors note the significant impact of dominant group members positionality for their perceptions of and subsequent thinking about social inequality. They conclude, “power facilitates stereotyping by design, inhibiting high-power perceivers from seeking more complex interpretations to explain systemic inequality.”[[24]](#footnote-22) Thus, for Operario and colleagues, power is everywhere present, not only in the content of stereotypes but also in the tendency to employ stereotypes to explain unequal power relations.

Operario, Goodwin, and Fiske’s research also demonstrates that power relations matter for the use of stereotypes at the interpersonal level—i.e., when power relations are a function of social roles (e.g., manager, employee, etc.) rather than social groups (e.g., whites, males, heterosexuals). Operario and colleagues find that interpersonal power asymmetries result in increased use of stereotypes in cognition by high-power perceivers. High-power perceivers’ use of stereotypes is especially problematic because in depending upon stereotypes, high-power perceivers make judgments that “endorse and exacerbate power differentials between social groups.”[[25]](#footnote-23)

According to Operario and colleagues , high-power perceivers engage in stereotypical thinking for two reasons. First, they engage in stereotypical thinking because they tend to feel “especially entitled to judge others.”[[26]](#footnote-24) Since high-power people occupy positions of authority, the authors argue, a “sense of authority may in turn produce a sense of superiority with regard to one’s own opinions and beliefs. Thus, the powerful may simply feel more comfortable relying on their stereotypes because these beliefs feel right.” From the perspective of the high-power perceiver, then, their position vis-à-vis others authorizes them to make judgments on the basis of their opinions or personal beliefs. A second reason high-power perceivers engage in stereotyping is to “maintain power asymmetry…[by] reducing threats to the self.” In this instance, high-power perceivers are likely to think about members of marginalized social groups in terms of their negative stereotypes in order to protect their sense of superiority and the “integrity of their self definitions.”[[27]](#footnote-25) High-power perceivers are “motivated to interpret information with a bias toward stereotypes and existing power differentials.”[[28]](#footnote-26) As a result, Operario and colleagues research shows, high-power perceivers “actively seek information that confirms their stereotypes and virtually ignore information that challenges these beliefs.”[[29]](#footnote-27) Thus, interpersonal power—like social power—increases the likelihood of the use of stereotypes in thinking about social others.

For Operario, Goodwin, and Fiske, then, power is everywhere because it pervades the categories through which we perceive and think about social others. In addition, power is everywhere because it plays an active role in our cognitive strategies we employ when thinking about social others. Thus, while Foucault calls attention to the ways in which power circulates throughout our social world, Operario and colleagues call our attention to the ways in which power informs and influences our internal, cognitive processes. Taken together, Foucault, Operario, Goodwin, and Fiske’s research indicates there is no realm to which power has no access or influence. Power is everywhere in that it is everywhere the active organizing principle—ordering our institutions, our identities, our knowledge, our thinking about ourselves and others. Thus, Foucault, Operario, Goodwin, and Fiske’s research demonstrates the reach of power. What remains to be explained, however, is the mobility of power and its effects—that is, how power moves from discursive formations to patterns of activation. In the final section of this chapter, I will offer an account of power’s movement from the social environment to subjectivity and back again.

**From Discursive Formations to Patterns of Activation:**

As discussed above, both Foucault and social cognition researchers Operario, Goodwin, and Fiske argue that understanding and combating social inequality requires attending to the ways in which power operates in our categorical thinking about others. Foucault and other Foucauldian social and political theorists study the workings of power in discursive and institutional structures, as they construct social groups and create categories of human difference. Social cognitive psychologists investigate the ways in which social categories are learned during the socialization process and the effects of social category stereotypes on our thinking about ourselves and social others. Both of these streams of research offer us significant insight into the persistence and maintenance of social inequality. However, on my view, our understanding of the processes that construct and maintain social inequality would be deepened and enriched through an integration of these diverse research literatures. Integrating these two approaches, I argue, will help us to understand the ways in which the processes of social construction influence both the formation of our selves and the development of our ability to act justly and equitably in the sociopolitical environment. Understanding the ways in which power operates concurrently at the discursive, institutional, and cognitive levels can illuminate new political strategies for achieving social justice.[[30]](#footnote-28) Thus, in this section of the chapter, I offer an account of the fluid, continuous, and diverse operations of power at the discursive, institutional, and cognitive levels, in hopes of identifying new strategies for combating the uses of power that encourage and sustain social inequality.

At the discursive level, power operates through the establishment of discursive formations and through the circulation of discourse. For Foucault, within the field of discourse—that is, within the domain of all possible, intelligible statements in a given spatiotemporal context—certain discursive regularities emerge.[[31]](#footnote-29) These regularities are referred to as *discursive formations*.[[32]](#footnote-30) Discursive formations emerge from the broader field of discourse as patterns of statements are established that delimit a particular object in the continuous social environment and offer hypotheses as to the object’s origin, meaning, purpose, etc. Discursive formations do not refer to a unity—that is, they do not refer to a singularly defined object about which there is consensus around the meaning and significance of the object. Instead, discursive formations contain multiple, conflicting statements that variously define an object and offer hypotheses about the object. Whatever may be said about an object in a given time and space is part of the discursive formation for the object. All statements that may be intelligibly made about an object in a spatiotemporal context constitute the discursive formation for the object.

For example, as the category homosexual began to take shape in discourse, certain discursive regularities emerged. The category became intelligible as patterns of statements—statements that defined the category and established its limits—became increasingly circulated in discourse. The discursive formation for homosexuality contains all of the statements that could potentially be sensibly made about homosexuality in a given cultural and temporal location. This includes, not only statements that posit the limits of the category (i.e., who is or is not a homosexual), but also all statements that express hypotheses about the category. Thus, the discursive formation on homosexuality is constituted by statements of valuation (i.e., homosexuality is good, bad, or neither), hypotheses about causation (i.e., genetics, choice, or some combination of the two), beliefs about the appropriate social response (i.e., acceptance, condemnation, or indifference), hypotheses about associated traits, etc.

Discursive formations for identity categories depend upon what Foucault refers to as dividing practices.[[33]](#footnote-31) For Foucault, dividing practices are the learned processes through which the “subject is either divided inside himself or divided from others.”[[34]](#footnote-32) That is, dividing practices are the processes through which we learn to distinguish ourselves from others as this “kind” of person. We learn to divide human beings into various social groupings and we internalize those social divisions. In addition, we learn to divide our selves into various identity components (e.g., my identities as an academic, a wife, an activist, a spiritual being). These divisions perform the double function of joining and separating ourselves from others. As a result of our dividing practices, we are able to recognize those both alike and unlike us. Furthermore, by dividing our selves into component identities, we learn to compartmentalize the aspects of our selves (e.g., as a secular academic, to be taken seriously I must not discuss the elements of my self that are most closely connected to my own mystical experiences of the divine). These dividing practices are central to our self-construction processes, through which we become both social objects for others and social subjects.

Power operates at the level of discursive formations in two ways. First, power authorizes particular discourses as a function of their compatibility or complicity in existing power relations. Discourses that undermine or contest existing power relations become “subjugated knowledges,” or discourses that are viewed as less authoritative, less accurate or reliable due to their incompatibility with the existing power relations. Second, power operates at the level of discursive formation by facilitating the communication of discourses that are compatible or complicit with existing power relations.[[35]](#footnote-33) People with the ability to effectively use or exert power are better situated to circulate their preferred discourses about a particular object or category. Either because of access to resources, social status, or for various other reasons, people who can effectively use power—who occupy positions in the field of power relations that privilege them over others—have disproportionate impact on the circulation of discourse and the elements of discursive formations that become authorized or privileged in a given social context.

With respect to discursive formations for identity categories, those discursive elements that are most frequently circulated and consistent with the prevailing power relations become commonly known *stereotypes*. Stereotypes are “categorical simplifications” of social group members.[[36]](#footnote-34) Within discursive formations, multiple, competing stereotypes are possible. However, those that become the most widely known (if not most widely endorsed) are those that are circulated with greater frequency and those that are most consistent with existing power relations. Those stereotypes that predominate in a given social context are those that “maintain social hegemony” by “provid[ing] the ideological foundations for maintaining the status quo.” Thus, power operates at the level of discursive formations in the establishment and circulation of stereotypes that encourage and justify social subordination and inequality.

As children develop, they learn to categorize others—or, to think with stereotypes—through both direct and indirect socialization processes. Although in some instances, parents or teachers may “explicitly [tell] students what to believe about members of specific groups,” most socialization takes place indirectly, as children infer information about social categories from their own observations and experiences.[[37]](#footnote-35) Thus, even children who do not receive explicit instructions to ascribe negative characteristics to various social groups will internalize negative stereotypes about marginalized groups as a result of indirect socialization through exposure to color-blind racism, biased media representations of marginalized groups, etc.[[38]](#footnote-36)

According to psychologist David J. Schneider, children learn and internalize stereotypes in four stages. First, they learn “the social categories they should use.”[[39]](#footnote-37) Humans vary across a number of dimensions, but only some of these dimensions are culturally constructed as salient, significant differences. As children learn which differences are culturally significant, they also learn “what features ‘go with’ each of the social categories they acquire.”[[40]](#footnote-38) At this stage, children learn the content of stereotypes, or the characteristics ascribed to various social groups. Concurrently, children learn “to attach some affect or emotion to each of their categories.”[[41]](#footnote-39) Affect is learned both directly and indirectly. As Schneider notes, “children may be directly taught to like or dislike certain groups by parents or other socialization agents.” Alternatively, learned “stereotypes may lay the foundation for affect,” in that children may learn that particular social group have negative characteristics and, as a result, “develop negative feelings toward that group.”[[42]](#footnote-40) Finally, children learn “acceptable and unacceptable behaviors that are displayed toward members of” social groups. Children learn which group members are to be treated with kindness, and which group members should be met with hostility. Thus, the socialization process through which children learn to think categorically about others is a complex, multi-stage process in which category knowledge and stereotypes develop over time.

It is important to note that children develop category knowledge and stereotypes for social groups before they have the cognitive capacity to evaluate stereotypical content and reflect on its accuracy and/or appropriateness. As Patricia G. Devine explains,

There is strong evidence that stereotypes are well established in children’s memories before children develop the cognitive ability and flexibility to question or critically evaluate the stereotype’s validity or acceptability…As a result, personal beliefs (i.e., decisions about the appropriateness of stereotypic ascriptions) are necessarily newer cognitive structures…An additional consequence of this developmental sequence is that stereotypes have a longer history of activation and are *therefore likely to be more accessible than personal beliefs*. To the extent that an individual rejects the stereotype, he or she experiences a fundamental conflict between the already established stereotype and the more recently established personal belief.[[43]](#footnote-41)

Hence, stereotypes have special impact on our thinking about social others because of the early stage at which we learn them and the frequency with which we subsequently encounter them. Both factors make stereotypes chronically accessible and automatically activated when encountering group members in the social environment.[[44]](#footnote-42)

Once people have learned the relevant criteria for grouping humans and the characteristic traits associated with the stereotype for that group, any encounter with a member of a particular social group or any representation or symbol of the social group will result in the activation of the category and stereotype in the perceiver’s mind.[[45]](#footnote-43) To clarify, people have extensive knowledge of social groups that they have acquired through communication with others, media consumption, and direct experience. This broad base of knowledge is available and potentially accessible to them when thinking about members of various social groups. However, people cannot call up all of the knowledge they have about a particular category or social group when they are active in the social environment. Instead, only some elements of their knowledge about social categories and groups will become activated in their thinking about others. Since stereotypes have a long history of frequent activation, they are chronically accessible to us and automatically activated when perceiving social others. Even though each person has a diverse and multifaceted network of knowledge about social groups, stereotypical *patterns of activation* have an automatic and disproportionate effect on social cognition.[[46]](#footnote-44)

In this way, power’s operation at the discursive level has significant effects on our cognitive functioning. Stereotypes are the results of the workings of power, as those elements of the *discursive formations* for particular social groups that are compatible with existing power relations become the *patterns of activation* through which we initially perceive and interpret the stimuli in the social environment. Thus, the circulation of negative or stigmatizing discourses about marginalized groups, extends the reach of power from the realm of discourse to the cognitive realm as humans learn and internalize social group stereotypes. Because of the pervasive character of existing power relations that subordinate women to men, nonwhites to whites, LGBTQI persons to cis-gender and heterosexual persons, “anyone participating in this culture is chronically primed by social cues that associate these categories with negative attributes, continually activating insidious stereotypes…and strengthening [stereotypical] interpretation.”[[47]](#footnote-45) Stereotypical patterns of activation, then, both express and extend existing power relations as they are used to perceive and interpret our social environment.

Although all persons in our culture learn our social stereotypes, people differ with respect to the ways in which they utilize stereotypes in their thinking about social others.[[48]](#footnote-46)

In her influential research on the impact of stereotypes on cognition, Patricia G. Devine finds that low-prejudice and high-prejudice people do not differ with respect to knowledge of social stereotypes. Both low- and high-prejudice people know the characteristics associated with marginalized social groups. Furthermore, for both low- and high-prejudice people, those stereotypes are activated when encountering members of stereotyped groups and/or representations or symbols of stereotyped groups. Where low-prejudice and high-prejudice people differ, she finds, is with respect to stereotype inhibition after activation (i.e., the extent to which they inhibit or suppress the stereotypical information when perceiving others and interpreting behavior).[[49]](#footnote-47)

According to Devine’s research and research conducted by Galen V. Bodenhausen and C. Neil Macrae, people’s identity goals drive the cognitive processes that determine whether stereotypes that are activated get inhibited or applied.[[50]](#footnote-48) Bodenhausen and Macrae’s model of stereotype activation and inhibition illustrates the way in which identity goals influence the use of stereotypes at the levels of initial processing, personal control, and social control. At the level of initial processing, identity goals influence stereotype activation and inhibition by determining whether the person will allow the activated stereotype to influence cognition or will attempt to suppress the stereotype. Low-prejudice people are motivated to suppress the stereotype because the “stereotype conflicts with their nonprejudiced, egalitarian values.”[[51]](#footnote-49) In order to protect their preferred view of themselves as just and equitable actors, low-prejudice people suppress stereotypes when they become activated. Since high-prejudice persons do not have the egalitarian identity goals that low-prejudice persons have, they lack sufficient motivation to inhibit stereotypes when they are activated. Thus, at the level of initial processing, identity goals drive stereotype activation and inhibition processes.

For Bodenhausen and Macrae, stereotype activation and inhibition at the level of personal control occurs during interpretive processing. The authors note that stereotypes influence cognitive processing by acting as frameworks for interpreting stimuli and providing people with expectations that orient them in experience.[[52]](#footnote-50) Whether people interpret stimuli in the social environment in terms of the stereotype is largely driven by their identity goals, which can vary depending on social context.[[53]](#footnote-51) Bodenhausen and Macrae explain,

In the locker room, even the most egalitarian males may espouse sexist beliefs. This situation is a clear case where a superordinate goal state (i.e., “stereotyping is wrong”) has been temporarily overridden by a contextually salient subordinate processing objective (i.e., “I’m with my sexist friends, so I must also be sexist”). In such a setting, the salient personal goal state provides the system with a new reference value and behavior is regulated accordingly.[[54]](#footnote-52)

Thus, although a person may have an abstract, superordinate goal to honor their commitment to egalitarian values, in some contexts other subordinate identity goals may be more salient and therefore guide behavior. People’s goals always drive interpretation processes, although the content of those goals may vary according to situation and context.

Ziva Kunda and Steven J. Spencer find that self-enhancement goals influence the application of stereotypes in interpretive processing.[[55]](#footnote-53) Kunda and Spencer explain, people “have ongoing self-enhancement goals that can often be satisfied by stereotype application.”[[56]](#footnote-54) For example, when a person receives negative feedback from a member of a negatively stereotyped group, that person can lessen the impact of negative feedback by activating the negative stereotype for the person giving the feedback. Doing so allows the person receiving the feedback to protect her positive self-evaluation by derogating the source of the negative information about the self.[[57]](#footnote-55) Similarly, when people perceive threats to their own self-worth, they are more likely to apply stereotypes in their thinking about social others. When perceivers encounter information that challenges their preferred view of themselves, they can increase their feelings of self-worth and superiority by engaging in stereotypical thinking. Conversely, Kunda and Spencer find that when people have self-affirming experiences, they are less likely to apply stereotypes in their thinking about social others. Kunda and Spencer argue that this “may be because self-affirmed perceivers are…no longer under pressure to apply their stereotypes so as to satisfy their self-enhancement goals, [and so] their motivation to avoid prejudice prevails and prevents them from applying activated stereotypes.”[[58]](#footnote-56)

For Bodenhausen and Macrae, stereotype activation and inhibition is also affected by social control influences. By social control, the authors mean the suppression of stereotypes in response to the prevailing social norms in a given context. “[S]ocial control requires that the individuals be familiar with expectations and standards for acceptable and unacceptable behavior.”[[59]](#footnote-57) Therefore, in an environment in which the prevailing social norm is (at least ostensibly) egalitarian, people should generally be aware of the egalitarian expectations that should guide their behaviors. These people will be motivated to avoid behavior that expresses the application of a stereotype. However, in a social context in which egalitarianism is not the social norm, social control will not inhibit the application of stereotypes. Under such circumstances, people will lack sufficient motivation to conceal the application of stereotypes. As a result, stereotype endorsing and rejecting behavior will vary as a function of social control and normative expectations.

Research conducted by Margo J. Monteith, Patricia G. Devine, and Julia R. Zuwerink shows that social control affects low-prejudice and high-prejudice subjects differently. In social contexts in which the prevailing norm is egalitarian, both low-prejudice and high-prejudice subjects voice support for egalitarian values. However, when low-prejudice and high-prejudice persons’ behavior contradicts their espoused values, low-prejudice and high-prejudice people have different cognitive-affective responses. Low-prejudice people experience discomfort when confronted with their discrepant behavior, and their negative affect is *self-directed*. Low-prejudice people experience guilt and engage in self-criticism when their behavior violates their personally held egalitarian values. They show evidence of “self-regulatory processes…aimed at avoiding future discrepant responses.”[[60]](#footnote-58) Conversely, high-prejudice subjects experience discomfort when confronted with their prejudiced behavior, however their negative affect is “directed at others” instead of themselves. The authors note, “rather than feeling guilty and self-critical…high-prejudice subjects felt angry, irritated, and disgusted with others.”[[61]](#footnote-59) High-prejudice subjects know that they have transgressed the egalitarian social norm and as a result experience feelings of threat.

As power moves from the discursive realm to the cognitive realm—as power relations are internalized through the socialization processes in which we learn to think categorically about people—power intersects with personal motivation in varied and complicated ways. As discussed above, people who occupy positions of power within the field of power relations are most likely to use stereotypes when thinking about social others. In addition, people can be motivated to apply stereotypes in their thinking about others for a variety of other reasons, often to protect their positive view of themselves. The intersection of social power and personal motivation can be especially problematic for members of dominant social groups, as these people will be more inclined to use stereotypes in thinking about others not only to legitimize their privileged social position, but also to maintain a positive sense of self. Political and/or social messages that challenge their unearned advantages will be especially threatening to dominant group members because they undermine not only the power relations that privilege dominant group members, but also the individual dominant group member’s positive sense of self.

In institutions, power and social categories intersect and interact in a variety of important ways. As Foucault explains in his essay, “Governmentality,” institutions hierarchically structure and organize the movement of power. Institutions exist for managing the activities of populations. Managing populations requires extensive knowledge of the characteristics of the population.[[62]](#footnote-60) Thus, institutions are faced with the task of dividing the human population into various groups. In doing so, institutions facilitate the management of populations, as comparative knowledge across various social groupings provides institutional agents with more detailed knowledge of the population that allows them to more effectively govern the population in a given domain. In this way, the practice of dividing human beings into various social categories contributes to institutions’ ability to use power effectively.

Social categories not only contribute to institutional power, but also are the result of institutional power. Institutional policies can have the effect of creating new social categories, or new “kinds” of people. For example, in *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault illustrates the way in which the emergence of prisons as disciplinary institutions resulted in the construction of new social categories such as convict, inmate, and criminal. Furthermore, institutional policies can contribute to the development of stereotypes associated with social categories. For example, Nancy Hirschmann’s research has demonstrated the way in which government social welfare programs’ increasing regulation of mothers in need of financial assistance has contributed to the development of the stereotype of the “welfare mother,” that stigmatizes financially vulnerable mothers as sexually irresponsible or deviant, as well as lazy and undeserving of social support.[[63]](#footnote-61) Finally, similarly structured interactions between members of social groups and institutions can lead to the development of dispositional or characteristic similarities in social group members. As Foucault explains, people in prisons share common experiences associated with imprisonment such as exposure to arbitrary punishment at the hands of the guards, menial labor during imprisonment, diminished ability to secure employment and provide for oneself upon release. These shared experiences impact incarcerated people, and often have the effect of cultivating contempt for the law and state while encouraging recidivism.[[64]](#footnote-62) As this example demonstrates, institutional policies can have the effect of creating particular kinds of subjects as a result of the ways in which their policies effect those people who are singled out and managed by institutions.

Social inequality is perpetuated and maintained by the mutually constructive interplay of discursive, institutional, and cognitive processes. Power circulates throughout the social world, moving throughout the discursive, institutional, and cognitive realms concurrently. Power does not move unidirectionally, from discourse to institutions to subjectivity. Instead, we are active agents directing the flow of power as we construct and deploy discourses and as we interact with social institutions. Yet, our ability to effectively use power to change the social world is not unconstrained. We face significant challenges at each of the discursive, institutional, and cognitive levels. We are constrained by the conventions of our linguistic communities—by the limits of the intelligible in a given social order. We can attempt to create new discourses around identity categories, but to be effective our discourses must be heard and understood by social others. We are also constrained by institutions. Institutions are highly effective in exerting power because of the way in which they organize and structure power’s movement. Power becomes more mobile and easily focused as institutions become entrenched. This intensifies the constraining effects of institutions. Furthermore, we are constrained by existing power relations at the cognitive level. During socialization, we internalize social categories/stereotypes/patterns of activation that reflect and reinforce existing power relations. We learn to *think through* these patterns of activation before we are capable of *reflecting on* these patterns of activation. As we learn to make sense of the social world, we learn stereotypes that degrade nondominant groups. These negative patterns of activation pervade our thinking, even once we have learned to endorse egalitarian social norms and to regulate our behavior accordingly. These negative stereotypes affect the cognition of high- and low-prejudice people, Black and white people alike. Everyone who is socialized in this culture learns to think through these categories. In this way, power relations shape who we are at the most fundamental, cognitive level.

**Conclusion:**

In this chapter, I have argued that an integration of Foucauldian analysis and social cognition research can help to further our understanding of the persistence of social hierarchies by explaining the ways in which power operates at the discursive, institutional, and cognitive levels. However, there are two potential objections I could imagine one might pose to such an integration. First, some scholars who study Foucault may reject the incorporation of social science research into Foucauldian theory. At first glance, integrating Foucault’s concepts and analysis with insights from social cognition researchers may seem problematic. As a subfield of social psychology, social cognition sits squarely within the social sciences. Quite famously, Foucault was skeptical of the social, or as he called them, “human sciences.”[[65]](#footnote-63) However, Foucault’s skepticism of the “truths” produced by the social sciences does not and need not indicate a wholesale rejection of the social sciences generally. Throughout his work, Foucault emphasized the contingency of truth claims. He argued that power produces and authorizes knowledge.[[66]](#footnote-64) He cautioned his readers to be attentive to the way in which knowledge generated by the social sciences reflected and reinforced relations of power—instead of rejecting the social sciences outright.[[67]](#footnote-65) The social sciences were “dangerous” because of how they might be used to reinforce relations of power and systems of domination.[[68]](#footnote-66) However, his acknowledgement of their dangerous potential does not entail a rejection of their usefulness for explaining social phenomena. Foucault asks that his readers be careful to attend to relations of power when reading and interpreting works of social science. He does not suggest that his readers abandon the social sciences altogether.[[69]](#footnote-67)

Furthermore, gender, sexuality, and race theorists who employ Foucauldian analytical tools in their own theorizing may initially bristle at the idea of incorporating scientific research into theories of the subject. For many theorists, Foucault’s appeal lies in his anti-foundationalist, anti-essentialist account of the self. These theorists may resist incorporating Foucauldian analysis with concepts and theories from social cognition research due to a fear of reincorporating essentialist elements into theoretical constructions of the subject. However, with regard to the social cognition research that I am analyzing here, this fear is, I suggest, unnecessary. Social cognition and social cognitive neuroscience do not depend on essentialist nor determinist conceptions of the self. As prominent social cognitive neuroscientist Joseph LeDoux notes, contemporary, cutting-edge brain science is fundamentally compatible with the social construction of subjectivity.[[70]](#footnote-68)

A second objection one could make to such an integration would focus on the divergent understandings of power that can be found in Foucault’s works and in the work of Operario, Goodwin and Fiske. As discussed above, Foucault’s conceptualization of power is dynamic, relational, and fluid. On his account, power is not held or possessed, but rather exercised or used. However, Operario, Goodwin, and Fiske’s work does not depend upon a strictly Foucauldian understanding of power. Instead, they define power as “*the asymmetrical control of some individuals or groups over outcomes that matter to others*.”[[71]](#footnote-69) Some may interpret this conception of power as a more conventional, power-as-resource/power-as-held notion of power, and therefore incompatible with a Foucauldian understanding of power. However, I would emphasize that the definition of power offered by Operario, Goodwin, and Fiske is primarily concerned with *what certain people can do*. On my reading, Operario, Goodwin, and Fiske’s notion of power is sufficiently compatible with Foucault’s—at least enough to facilitate an integration of the two accounts of the workings of power—due to their concern with the powerful’s ability to exert their will on social others and institutions. In this way, the powerful in Operario, Goodwin, and Fiske’s work are distinguished by *their ability to use power* to protect their advantage and their positive sense of self.

These objections notwithstanding, I argue that the integration I have suggested in this chapter is useful for helping us to better understand the persistence of social hierarchies at the discursive, institutional, and cognitive levels. Foucault’s theory of power and social construction illuminates the role of discourses and institutions in creating and sustaining social inequalities. However, on its own, Foucault’s analysis cannot sufficiently explain the way in which power operates at the cognitive level. Conversely, social cognition research takes seriously the effects of power and motivation on cognition. However, social cognition research does not offer an account of the way in which the content of stereotypes and interactions with institutions are structured by power. Bringing these two research literatures to bear on the question of the creation and maintenance of social inequalities helps by illuminating the complex and multiple workings of power at the discursive, institutional, and cognitive levels. As a result, an integration of Focauldian analysis and social cognition research is useful for understanding the persistence of social hierarchies and for identifying potential political strategies for addressing social inequality.

Works Cited**:**

Alcoff, Linda Martín. "Foucault's Philosophy of Science: Structures of Truth/Structures of Power." In *Continental Philosophy of Science*, edited by Gary Gutting, 211-23. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005.

Barth, Fredrik, ed. *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference*. Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, Inc., 1998.

Barvosa, Edwina. *Wealth of Selves: Multiple Identities, Mestiza Consciousness, and the Subject of Politics*. Edited by Norma E. Cantú, Rio Grande/Río Bravo: Borderlands Culture and Traditions. College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2008.

Berger, Peter L., and Thomas Luckmann. *The Social Construction of Reality*. New York: Anchor Books, 1967.

Bodenhausen, Galen V., and C. Neil Macrae. "Stereotype Activation and Inhibition." In *Advances in Social Cognition, Volume Xi: Stereotype Activation and Inhibition*, edited by Robert S. Wyer, Jr., 1-52. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, 1998.

Briscoe-Smith, Allison. "How to Talk with Kids About Race." In *Are We Born Racist? New Insights from Neuroscience and Positive Psychology*, edited by Jason Marsh, Rodolfo Mendoza-Denton and Jeremy Adam Smith, 58-63. Boston: Beacon Press, 2010.

Brown, Wendy. "Power after Foucault." In *The Oxford Handbook of Political Theory*, edited by John S. Dryzek, Bonnie Honig and Anne Phillips, 65-84. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006.

Cohen, Anthony P. *The Symbolic Construction of Community*. Edited by Peter Hamilton, Key Ideas. New York: Tavistock Publications and Ellis Horwood Limited, 1985.

Devine, Patricia G. "Stereotypes and Prejudice: Their Automatic and Controlled Components." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 56, no. 1 (1989): 5-18.

Digeser, P.E. "The Fourth Face of Power." *Journal of Politics* 54, no. 4 (1992): 977-1007.

Foucault, Michel. "Two Lectures." In *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, edited by Colin Gordon, 78-108. New York: Pantheon Books, 1980.

Foucault, Michel. "The Subject and Power." *Critical Inquiry* 8, no. 4 (1982): 777-95.

Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality, Volume One: An Introduction*. Translated by Robert Hurley. New York: Vintage Books, 1990.

Foucault, Michel. "Governmentality." In *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality: With Two Lectures and an Interview with Michel Foucault*, edited by Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon and Peter Miller, 87-104. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991.

Foucault, Michel. *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. New York: Vintage Books, 1994.

Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Translated by Alan Sheridan. New York: Vintage Books, 1995.

Foucault, Michel. "On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress." In *Michel Foucault: Ethics, Subjectivity, and Truth*, edited by Paul Rabinow, 253-80. New York: The New Press, 1997.

Foucault, Michel. "What Is Enlightenment?" In *Michel Foucault: Ethics, Subjectivity, and Truth*, edited by Paul Rabinow, 303-19. New York: The New Press, 1997.

Foucault, Michel. *The Archaeology of Knowledge: And the Discourse on Language*. New York: Vintage Books, 2010.

Hirschmann, Nancy J. *The Subject of Liberty: Toward a Feminist Theory of Freedom*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003.

Kunda, Ziva, and Lisa Sinclair. "Motivated Reasoning with Sterotypes: Activation, Application, and Inhibition." *Psychological Inquiry* 10, no. 1 (1999): 12-22.

LeDoux, Joseph. *Synaptic Self: How Our Brains Become Who We Are*. New York: Viking, 2002.

Macrae, C. Neil, and Galen V. Bodenhausen. "Social Cognition: Thinking Categorically About Others." *Annual Review of Psychology* 51 (2000): 93-120.

Markus, Hazel. "Pride, Prejudice, and Ambivalence: Toward a Unified Theory of Race and Ethnicity." *American Psychologist* 63, no. 8 (2008): 651-70.

Monteith, Margo J., Patricia G. Devine, and Julia R. Zuwerink. "Self-Directed Versus Other-Directed Affect as a Consequence of Prejudice Related Discrepancies." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 64, no. 2 (1993): 198-210.

Operario, Don, Stephanie A. Goodwin, and Susan T. Fiske. "Power Is Everywhere: Social Control and Personal Control Both Operate at Stereotype Acitvation, Interpretation, and Response." In *Stereotype Activation and Inhibition*, edited by Robert S. Wyer, Jr. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, 1998.

Rooy, Dirk Van, Frank Van Overwalle, Tim Vanhoomissen, Christophe Labiouse, and Robert French. "A Recurrent Connectionist Model of Group Baises." *Psychological Review* 110, no. 3 (2003): 536-63.

Schneider, David J. *The Pscyhology of Stereotyping*. Edited by Kurt W. Fischer, E. Tory Higgins, Marcia Johnson and Walter Mischel, Distinguished Contributions in Psychology. New York The Guilford Press, 2005.

Sinclair, Lisa, and Ziva Kunda. "Reactions to a Black Professional: Motivated Inhibition and Activation of Conflicting Stereotypes." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 77, no. 5 (1999): 885-904.

Steele, Claude M. *Whistling Vivaldi: And Other Clues to How Stereotypes Affect Us*, Issues of Our Time. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2010.

Wheeler, Mary E., and Susan T. Fiske. "Controlling Racial Prejudice: Social-Cognitive Goals Affect Amygdala and Stereotype Activation." *Psychological Science* 16, no. 1 (2005): 56-63.

1. For influential late twentieth-century social constructivist texts, see Berger and Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality*; Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*; Cohen, *The Symbolic Construction of Community*; [↑](#footnote-ref--1)
2. For a concise statement of the impact of social constructivism on the social cognition approach to social psychology, see Markus, “Pride, Prejudice, and Ambivalence.” [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
3. See Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume One*, 93; Operario, Goodwin, and Fiske, “Power is Everywhere.” [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
4. For Foucault’s middle works, see *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality, Volume One.* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
5. For an essay explaining the impact of Foucault’s reconceptualization of power on political theory, see Brown, “Power after Foucault.” For a concise statement of the differences between power as conceptualized within the liberal and radical traditions compared with Foucault’s notion of power, see Digeser, “The Fourth Face of Power.” [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
6. Foucault, *History of Sexuality, Volume One*, 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
7. Foucault, “Two Lectures,” 83. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
8. Ibid., 93. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
9. Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” 777-778. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
10. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume One*, 43. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
11. The language of “meanings, values, and practices” is borrowed from Edwina Barvosa’s works on the social construction of identity. See Barvosa, *Wealth of Selves*, 66. Here, Barvosa offers a brief explanation of the formation of social identities as a socialization process through which group members internalize the “meanings, values, and practices” associated with group membership. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
12. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume One*, 101. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
13. Ibid., 92-93. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
14. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 26-27. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
15. Ibid., 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
16. Ibid., 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
17. Operario, Goodwin, and Fiske, “Power is Everywhere,” 166. Italics in original. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
18. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
19. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
20. Ibid., 167. Note here that “high-power perceivers” is a shorthand way of referring to people who, as a result of their social location or positionality, are especially effective at using power. The phrases “high-power perceivers” and “low-power perceivers” should not understood as indicators of the amount of power a person or group “holds” or “possesses.” In this section, I have not reverted back to a pre-Foucauldian understanding of power. However, the phrases “high-power perceivers” and “low-power perceivers” are used in the social cognition literature as a convenient, shorter phrased to indicate people who can effectively use power as a result of their positionality, and so I have used that language here for convenience and brevity as well. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
21. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
22. Ibid., 168. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
23. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
24. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
25. Ibid., 171. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
26. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
27. Ibid., 172. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
28. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
29. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
30. In what follows, I trace the operations of power, beginning with discursive formations and moving through the cognitive and institutional realms. In doing so, I do not mean to imply chronology, as power operates at each of these levels simultaneously. Although discourse and institutions exist prior to persons (as they are born into existing linguistic and institutional arrangements), discourses and institutions are always subject to revision and reconstruction. Thus, although discourses and institutions may, in some sense, precede the person, influence does not flow in a single direction. Instead, discourses, institutions, and persons are continually influencing each other through mutually constructing and reconstruction processes. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
31. See Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 80, 38. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
32. Ibid., 31-39. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
33. Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” 777. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
34. Ibid., 777-778. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
35. Operario, Goodwin, and Fiske agree on this point. See “Power is Everywhere,” 166. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
36. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
37. Schneider, *The Psychology of Stereotyping*, 338. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
38. Although some parents and teachers believe that refusing to acknowledge or discuss differences among humans will result in children who are less prejudiced and likely to think about social others in terms of negative stereotypes, recent research shows that avoiding explicit instruction on human differences has the opposite effect. That is, children whose socialization processes around human differences are exclusively indirect processes end up holding more stereotypical views of persons unlike themselves, being more biased towards members of other social groups, and feeling more uncomfortable in social situations with persons from other social groups. Socialization around issues of human difference need not be explicit to have pronounced negative effects. See Briscoe-Smith, “How to Talk with Kids about Race.” [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
39. Schneider, *The Psychology of Stereotyping*, 339. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
40. Ibid., 340. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
41. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
42. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
43. Devine, “Stereotypes and Prejudice,” 6. There is some evidence that under certain conditions, cognitive goals can override stereotype activation (see Wheeler and Fiske, “Controlling Racial Prejudice”). However, avoiding stereotype activation requires priming processes that encourage social individuation and/or goal manipulation processes that require subjects to locate a particular visual target on the person rather than to perceive the person holistically. This research shows that with sufficient manipulation perceivers can avoid automatically activating stereotypes. However, the artificiality of the laboratory environment and experimental tasks make the findings relatively irrelevant for everyday social interactions in which those experimental priming processes do not occur. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
44. See chapter two for a review of accessibility effects and chronic accessibility. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
45. See Devine, “Stereotypes and Prejudice,” 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
46. The language here of patterns of activation is meant to evoke and be compatible with the connectionist model of memory discussed in chapter two. Although much of the research discussed in this chapter assumes the associative network model of memory and activation, recent research has shown that the findings of associative network model research related to stereotypes and group biases are replicated in studies that are grounded in the connectionist model of memory and activation (see Rooy, et al., “A Recurrent Connectionist Model of Group Biases”). This finding should not be surprising as both the associative network and connectionist models of memory draw upon the same foundational theoretical sources and share many of the same assumptions. As noted in chapter two, either model is compatible with the theory I am developing here. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
47. Operario, Goodwin, and Fiske, “Power is Everywhere,” 168. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
48. Throughout this chapter I am only concerned with the effects of categorical thinking and stereotypes on our thinking about others and our ability to be just and equitable in our dealings with others. I am bracketing a discussion of the effects of categorical thinking and stereotypes on our thoughts about ourselves and the effects of self-stereotyping on our own behaviors. There is a large literature on the effects of social group stereotypes on group members’ thoughts and behaviors (see Steele, *Whistling Vivaldi* for an overview of research on stereotype threat). However, this discussion is outside the scope of this project. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
49. Devine, “Stereoypes and Prejudice.” [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
50. Ibid., 15-16. See also Bodenhausen and Macrae, “Stereotype Activation and Inhibition,” 20-23. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
51. Devine, “Stereotypes and Prejudice,” 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
52. Macrae and Bodenhausen, “Social Cognition,” 103. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
53. Bodenhausen and Macrae, “Stereotype Activation and Inhibition,” 20. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
54. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
55. Kunda and Spencer’s research draws upon earlier research on motivated stereotype activation and inhibition by Kunda and Lisa Sinclair. See Kunda and Sinclair, “Motivated Reasoning with Stereotypes.” See also Sinclair and Kunda, “Reactions to a Black Professional.” [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
56. Kunda and Spencer, “When Do Stereotypes Come to Mind and When Do They Color Judgment?” 536. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
57. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
58. Ibid., 537. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
59. Bodenhausen and Macrae, “Stereotype Activation and Inhibition.” [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
60. Monteith, Devine, and Zuwerink, “Self-Directed and Other Directed Affect as a Consequence of Prejudice-Related Discrepancies,” 198. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
61. Ibid., 208. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
62. Foucault, “Governmentality,” 99. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
63. Hirschmann, *The Subject of Liberty*, 138-169. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
64. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 266-268. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
65. Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 344-387. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
66. See Foucault’s second phase works, especially *The History of Sexuality, Volume One* and *Discipline and Punish*. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
67. Foucault regularly encouraged his readers to adopt a cautious stance vis-à-vis the human sciences and other products of the Enlightenment. He suggested that his readers should resist the easier temptation to either accept or reject the Enlightenment and its forms of knowledge. He argued against interpreting his critiques of the social sciences and the kind of rationality they presume as a prescription for aversive rejection. He wrote that his skepticism, “does not mean that one has to be ‘for’ or ‘against’ the Enlightenment. It even means precisely that one must refuse everything that might present itself in the form of a simplistic and authoritarian alternative: you either accept the Enlightenment and remain within the tradition of its rationalism…or else you criticize the Enlightenment and try to escape from its principles of rationality.” Instead, Foucault advocated a cautious engagement with the Enlightenment, its rationality, and the social sciences that resulted from the Enlightenment forms of knowing (Foucault, “What is Enlightenment?” 313). [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
68. Foucault spoke to the dangerousness of the social sciences in an interview, “On the Genealogy of Ethics.” He argued that Enlightenment ethics, “founded on so-called scientific knowledge of what the self is, what desire is, what the unconsciousness is, and so on,” was inadequate for the liberation movements of his time. However, he noted that his critique of their inadequacy at the time was not equivalent to their badness. He said, “My point is not that everything is bad, but that everything is dangerous. If everything is dangerous, then we always have something to do. So my position leads not to apathy but to a hyper- and pessimistic activism. I think the ethico-political choice we have to make every day is to determine which is the main danger” (ibid., 256). Thus, for Foucault, we cannot reject one problematic way of knowing in favor of a safer form of knowing that will not in some way depend upon the exercise of power. Every way of knowing entails its own danger, to which we must carefully attend even while engaging in that way or form of knowing. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
69. For an excellent account of Foucault’s ambivalent attitude toward the human sciences and scientific knowledge in general, see Alcoff, “Foucault’s Philosophy of Science.” [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
70. LeDoux, *Synaptic Self*, 20. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
71. Operario, Goodwin, and Fiske, “Power is Everywhere,” 166. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)