Chapter

2 Thinking (through) gender

Part 1

* Read and Annotate!
* Be prepared to Discuss!

In order to begin to understand masculinity, we need to frame it within a more general understanding of gender, otherwise we are left simply with a shopping list of features, characteristics, and behaviors. Alternatively, we find ourselves looking at a kind of do-it-yourself kit for constructing a predetermined notion of "man," or a self-help book offering us ways to become more recognizably and acceptably masculine. The title of this chapter is intended to suggest several possible simultaneous meanings and strategies.

"*Thinking* gender" suggests something along the lines of "having gender in mind," but also "a notion of gender that is self-conscious and self-reflexive." In addition, "Thinking *through* gender" implies first a careful consideration of both the idea of gender and how gender operates socially and culturally. Second, "thinking through gender" suggests that gender provides a lens or lattice by means of which we both perceive and think about the world, and through which we interact with it. Third, "thinking through gender" invites us to transcend gendered ways of thinking – to think *beyond* gender as familiar, comfortable, and, for the most part, invisible because it is simply a part of the way things just *are*.

Gender, sex, and sexuality

We begin with the term "gender" itself. Although this word occurs fairly regularly in everyday usage (for example, it is to be found frequently in official and semi-official questionnaires), its exact sense and implications are not always well understood. "Sex" and "gender" are often used interchangeably, although, as we shall see, there are key meanings that distinguish each from the other. Furthermore, particular formations of "gender" are thought to flow automatically from "sex." That is, there is an assumption that the body is an irreducible physical, material fact, so that its anatomical configuration (as male or female) necessarily entails the behaviors appropriate to a particular configuration, namely, masculine or feminine behaviors.

We need instead to think of gender not as a freestanding concept, but rather as related in a complex way to two other key concepts: sex and sexuality. One way

of thinking of the relationship between sex and gender is to see it as rather like that between raw material and processed product. Thus, in Western cultures it is generally understood that we may be *born either* male *or* female, that is, with differing genital configurations (namely, with a penis or a vagina) and reproductive capacities and functions. However, as we shall shortly see, not all cultures subscribe to a two-sex notion of the human body and reproduction process (often called *dimorphism*: having two forms). Nevertheless, we have to *live as* boys/men *or* girls/women. Put another way, we each must learn the behavior and manners, the gestures and attitudes that the culture deems appropriate to each sex. It is through learning these that we become socialized and *gendered*, moving from the raw fact of our individual anatomical sex (being male or female) to a processed social product (behaving as a man or a woman). The social and cultural expectations of a man and the manner and degree to which he acknowledges and lives up to them we understand as *masculinity*; those applicable to a woman, together with her compliance with them, we think of as *femininity*.

One way of understanding this is to think of the terms "male" and "female" as overdetermined, and indeed overwhelmed, by the concept of gender. That is, although we commonly think of "male" and "female" as the prior biological-anatomical bedrock on which gender ("masculinity" and "femininity") is founded, it is difficult to separate anatomical difference from gender difference. (This is an idea we will return to later in chapter 3, in a discussion of Judith Butler's notion of gender performativity.) The terms "man" or "woman" are thus in a sense ambiguous. They each encode a double meaning: the first signifies anatomical sex difference; the second, the ensemble of social and cultural expectations of each sex (namely, its gender) and the degree to which the individual of a particular sex measures up to and meets those expectations.

However, we should note that there is no *necessary* connection between the morphology of sex (male or female) and the combination of behavior and attitude that we call gender (masculinity or femininity). It is possible for a man to impersonate the feminine, just as a woman may impersonate the masculine. However, the culture ensures through a number of measures that its members believe in and subscribe to such a connection. These include the marginalizing or masking of other possibilities, and the ridiculing, humiliation. or even punishment of those who do not comply with those cultural expectations. Thus, because it is in our own interests, in order to survive and function in the culture, that we understand as seamless the connection between anatomical sex and culturally and socially imposed gender, we make simple equations: female body and genital characteristics = woman = femininity; male body and genital characteristics = man = masculinity. These assumptions (for that is in effect merely what they are) then become *naturalized*. That is, they appear to us to be in the natural order of things, logical, necessary, and the way things have always been, everywhere, for everyone.

So, when we encounter any disruption in these apparently natural chains of equivalences, we may tend to react with horror, revulsion, nausea, anger,

contempt, or violence, among other responses. This is the case not only often with women whose behavior is perceived to be "mannish" or with men who seem to be effeminate, but also with individuals whose bodily morphology may not easily fit into the two-sex, two-gender system that has developed in most Western societies. For example, the hermaphrodite, now usually called an *intersex* person, is someone born either with indeterminate sexual characteristics (for instance, a rudimentary penis or vagina) or with ambiguous ones (both a penis and a vagina, although commonly one may be less developed than the other). Such an individual is not easily classified within the existing sex/gender system. Accordingly, then, infants who are identified as hermaphrodite or intersex are often subjected to surgical "correction" or "gender reassignment," their sex often determined by parental choice as well as the reliance on the judgment and experience of the medical team in attendance. This, in turn, often means a compliance with cultural assumptions about what constitutes "boyness" or "girlness," which refers us back, in a loop, to cultural notions of masculinity and femininity.

To take another example, the condition in males known as androgen insensitivity syndrome (AIS) may cause the body to fail either to trip the necessary hormonal signals at puberty or to respond to those signals as the hormones flood the body. Those males with AIS may find that their voices do not break at puberty; one or both of their testes may fail to descend from the body into the scrotal sac; they may not develop facial or body hair; they may develop female-looking breasts: and so on. The condition is usually treated with injections of androgens (male hormones), especially testosterone. The point to grasp here is that *our two-sex, two-gender system does not allow for such individuals,* any more than it accommodates the intersex individual: indeed, *these identities disrupt the system itself.* Defined as anomalies and therefore as "abnormal" or "unnatural," their very anomalousness serves to confirm the authority of the two-sex, two-gender system in place.

To our understanding of that system we must add another component: sexuality. Just as the words "man" or "woman" embrace both the genital and reproductive configuration of individuals as well as the set of behaviors and attitudes expected of either sex, so "sexuality" as a term is ambiguous. It too covers a range of possible meanings. Chief among these are sexual orientation and sexual behavior. The latter in turn includes such factors as the degree of sexual activity in an individual's life, and the sexual practices that an individual finds erotically arousing as well as emotionally and psychologically satisfying.

Of the various possibilities available to men and women in the culture, the overriding assumption about sexual orientation is that it is, or should be, heterosexual, namely, oriented toward the opposite sex. The poet Adrienne Rich has called this "compulsory heterosexuality" (Rich, 1993: 227–54). After all, male and female genitals are formed as anatomically complementary with each other. Moreover, there is both an instinctual and a cultural need to propagate young, in order to ensure the future of the family, the community (or nation), and, beyond both of these, the species. Thus, not only is heterosexuality "natural," in the sense

of being the means, shared by most living things, by which offspring are generated, but it also structures social and cultural relationships between men and women.

The fact that women are the child-bearers, for example, has meant that women have traditionally been in addition assigned particular social roles, which include that of homemaker. However, as the anthropologist Gayle Rubin notes:

> Although every society has some sort of division of tasks by sex, the assignment of any particular task to one sex or the other varies enormously. In some groups, agriculture is the work of women, in others, the work of men. Women carry the heavy burdens in some societies, men in others. There are even examples of female hunters and warriors, and of men performing child-care tasks.
>
> (Rubin, 1997: 39)

Thus, from the perspective of the cultural mandating of heterosexuality (Rubin calls it "obligatory heterosexuality"; see, for instance, Rubin, 1997: 40), non-heterosexual orientations, inclinations, and practices are marked as "unnatural." Yet, as Rubin observes,

> Hunger is hunger, but what counts as food is culturally determined and obtained. … *Sex is sex, but what counts as sex is equally culturally determined and obtained.* Every society also has a sex/gender system – a set of arrangements by which the biological raw material of human sex and procreation is shaped by human, social intervention and satisfied in a conventional manner, no matter how bizarre some of the conventions may be.
>
> (Rubin, 1997: 32; emphasis added)

She earlier defines "sex/gender system" as "the set of arrangements by which human society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity and in which these transformed sexual needs are satisfied" (Rubin, 1997: 28). The relationship, therefore, between sex and gender is a complicated and nuanced one, and, moreover, varies from culture to culture, according to the social structure and social needs of each.

We should, therefore, be cautious about the idea of "normality." This term refers to the attitudes, practices, inclinations, and so on observed as shared by *most* members of the culture; a norm is simply a standard. However, in practice the *normal* tends to become the *normative*, that is, the requirement that *everyone* meet the relevant norm or standard. This shift from observation to requirement is not necessarily self-evident. Because the normative is often hedged with various threats and punishments to be meted out to nonconformists, it easily becomes the normal, as people in the culture move toward compliance rather than confront the consequences of noncompliance.

Activity 2.1

- Think about some instances in your own life, whether gained through observation, direct experience, the reading of books or the viewing of movies and TV, in which you have been able to detect a difference between normality and normativity.
    - On what criterion (or criteria) of behavior did the distinction depend (for example, a norm of gender behavior or sexual practice)?

Essentialist versus constructionist views

We need, therefore, to be careful about assuming a simple relationship between the human sex–gender–sexuality triad and the sex–sexuality dyad of other creatures in our world. In the first place, gender appears to be chiefly a social and cultural phenomenon, in so far as it is not governed simply by instinct, implanted by the process of evolution. Gender requirements and assigned behaviors differ not only across cultures, but may also change across historical periods within a single culture.

If we look beyond Western cultures, we find that other cultures may have more complex sex/gender systems. For example, some Native American peoples structure into their sex/gender system a third gender, the so-called *berdache* or Two-Spirit person, that is, someone anatomically of one sex who identifies with the other gender. Many Native Americans object to the term "berdache," used widely in anthropological work on North American indigenous peoples (see, for example, Greenberg, 1988: 40–56). The term originates in a Spanish word that suggests male effeminacy and/or sexual submissiveness. For the cultures concerned, "Two-Spirit individual" is the preferred term, and does not necessarily define the individual so described by sexual orientation or role (Stryker, 2004). Although Two-Spirit persons may have sometimes been made objects of ridicule or contempt (often ritualized) within their particular cultures, at the same time they have also been regarded as revered shaman figures who have escaped the division into one sex or another, or who have embodied both sexes in the one body and identity. Likewise, in Greco-Roman culture, hermaphrodites may have been reviled by those around them, but they also inspired awe because of the twinned sex identities that they literally embodied.

A still more nuanced gender-system exists in Sulawesi, in the Indonesian archipelago, where among the Bugis people there are "three sexes (female, male, intersex), four genders (women, men, calabai [false woman], and calatai [false man], and a fifth meta-gender group, the bissu [literally 'transvestite priest,' but in fact hermaphroditic]" (Graham, 2001). In addition, such complexity implies an equal richness in cultural notions of and possibilities for sexual orientation and activity, whereas historically in most Western cultures heterosexuality has

been the only officially sanctioned erotic orientation. If gender were indeed innate and the inevitable result of anatomical sex, such variations as we have considered among Native Americans and the Bugis people ought to be simply impossible.

Theories of gender and gender behavior that argue from nature, natural history, and the observed behavior of animals may be grouped under the category of *essentialist* theorizations. That is, they assume an essence of sex and gender that is reproduced genetically. Such theories frequently invoke Charles Darwin's important and influential idea of the evolution of species, as well as archeological and anthropological findings; and they underlie popular notions such as the idea that man is the hunter whereas woman is the gatherer, or that in engaging in the often ruthless cut-and-thrust of modern business, men simply replicate what their ancestors did on the African savanna in prehistoric times. These characterizations are founded on the idea that our collective archaic past as human beings and the way people lived in those days are hardwired into our brains and bodies. For instance, aggressive or violent male behavior is accordingly explained by such bodily factors as the larger, more muscular male physique and the effect of the powerful male hormone testosterone, and their function in protecting territory and clan or primitive community from intruders or invaders.

Essentialist theories of gender also often draw parallels between humans and animals in terms of social and sexual behaviors and social organization. Data gathered from experiments with animals or the observation of animals in their natural habitats may be applied to humans, in order to explain human practices, responses, or ways of behaving. The argument that human beings are also "just" animals overlooks or willfully ignores such facts as that people have not lived in identical kinds of society. For example, it is difficult to discern whether democracy, as a way of organizing society, has much meaning for or in animal groups as diverse as, say, ants and wolves, whereas humans have gone to war in order to preserve the notion of democracy or to impose it on societies deemed unjust, according to the lights of democracy as a set of beliefs about how societies should be organized.

Perhaps the paradigmatic case is that of same-sex sexual behavior. Historically, the condemnation of homosexuality (especially male homosexuality) in Western cultures has been justified by reference to the Bible, the founding Judeo-Christian scriptural text of those cultures. Although several passages in both the Old and New Testaments speak disapprovingly of homosexual relations and forbid them, the key passages are generally taken to be in the Book of Leviticus. Leviticus 18:22 states, in the King James Version (1611), "Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind: it is abomination," and Leviticus 20:13 commands, "If a man also lie with mankind, as he lieth with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination: they shall surely be put to death. Their blood shall be upon them." The Hebrew *to'evah* is here translated as "abomination," implying not only transgression but something that both contravenes and revolts nature as well as God, whereas the rendering "sin" in more recent translations is somewhat more anodyne, and suggests an offence to God only. John Boswell argues that the

Hebrew word "does not usually signify something intrinsically evil, like rape or theft (discussed elsewhere in Leviticus), but something which is ritually unclean for Jews, like eating pork or engaging in intercourse during menstruation, both of which are prohibited in these same chapters." He infers from this that "Leviticus 18 is specifically designed to distinguish the Jews from the pagans among whom they had been living, or would live … ." Boswell goes on to argue that the injunction against male homosexuality was therefore intended to preserve the ritual cleanliness of the Jews as a people, rather than being simply a moral condemnation of sexual transgression (Boswell, 1980: 100–101).

Nevertheless, by the Middle Ages, homosexuality came to be understood as *peccatum contra naturam*: *the* (not merely *a*) sin against nature (Boswell, 1980: 103, note 42), a sense perpetuated by the King James English translation of the Bible, the standard in English-speaking cultures for several centuries. However, Boswell cautions us to treat the notion of "nature" with care, because the term is a philosophical as well as semantic minefield. It may refer, among other things, to that which is the essence of something, and hence characteristic of it. It may signify a generalization for the "observable universe"; or for that which "does or would occur without human intervention" (Boswell, 1980: 11). Boswell notes that the condemnation of homosexuality as unreproductive and therefore unnatural is selective:

> Nonreproductivity can in any case hardly be imagined to have induced intolerance of gay people in ancient societies which idealized celibacy or in modern ones which consider masturbation perfectly 'natural,' since both of these practices have reproductive consequences identical with those of homosexual activity. This objection is clearly a justification rather than a cause of prejudice.
>
> (Boswell, 1980: 12)

He also points out that the assumption that homosexual behavior is absent among animals

> is demonstrably false: homosexual behavior, sometimes involving pair-bonding, has been observed among many animal species in the wild as well as in captivity. This has been recognized since the time of Aristotle and, incredible as it seems, has been accepted by people who *still* objected to homosexual behavior as unknown to other animals.
>
> (Boswell, 1980: 12; original emphasis)

Boswell argues further that this assumption

> is predicated on another assumption – that uniquely human behavior is not "natural" – which is fundamentally unsupportable in almost any context, biological or philosophical. Many animals in fact engage in behavior which is unique to their species, but no one imagines that such behavior is "unnatural"; on the contrary, it is regarded as part of the "nature" of the species in question and is useful to taxonomists in distinguishing the species from other types of organisms. If man were the only species to demonstrate homosexual desires and behavior, this would hardly be grounds for categorizing them as "unnatural." Most of the behavior which human societies most admire is unique to humans: this is indeed the main reason it is respected. No one imagines that human society "naturally" resists literacy because it is unknown among other animals.
>
> (Boswell, 1980: 12–13)

Essentialist theorizations of sex and gender, and the relationship between these, have contributed a good deal to our understanding of this complex set of terms and concepts, and the behaviors to which they refer. Such theorizations are, because of their scientific nature, grounded in Enlightenment notions of knowledge, chiefly the idea that the world and all that it contains can be measured, weighed, quantified, and analyzed according to a restricted set of methods and procedures. However, as we have seen, for example in Boswell's critique of ideas of "nature" and same-sex behaviors, the application of other methods and procedures may highlight weaknesses or blind spots in this scientific method.

Moreover, essentialist arguments can be used as political devices or weapons. For example, essentialist notions of "woman" and "femininity" have been used to argue against feminism and the increasing presence in the public sphere of women, and essentialist arguments from "nature" have justified attacks both verbal and physical on homosexual men and women. Indeed, one key difficulty with essentialist theory is that, effectively, it renders futile any hope of social change. If it were true that today we are simply replaying and reenacting the scripts by which our remotest ancestors survived, the best we can hope for is the containment, rather than the change and development, of attitudes and behaviors deemed antisocial – although how these latter can be thought of in that way becomes problematic, if they are indeed the foundation of who we are.

Constructionist (or constructivist) theories of gender argue, to the contrary, that, rather than *structuring* social relations, *gender is the product of the way a society develops*. Whereas essentialist theories situate gender in the material body and relate it to both physiological factors (such as hormones) and a history of species development, constructionist theories postulate that there are social and cultural influences that operate in and around such material factors as the body, whatever its evolutionary history. Those influences precede our individual entry into the world. Consequently, we must, from our earliest years, learn how to accommodate ourselves to them and how to find our place within the structures that they create. In other words, *we cannot construct our gender for ourselves*: it is predetermined for us by a vast, complex, and (at least in our very early years) irresistible array of forces, pressures, and persuasions.

Thus, even before an infant is born, one of the first things its parents often want to know is its sex. Once this has been determined, an almost invisible machinery starts up, setting in place patterns of expectation and compulsion, beginning with

such apparently innocuous items as the kinds of color deemed appropriate for the baby's clothing, the sorts of toys that it will be given to play with, and the like. Even when the child has parents who are sensitive to issues of gender and who seek to neutralize conventional expectations of boys and girls, social and cultural influences still play a powerful role, through playgroups, friendships, schooling, television programs, advertising, and so on. Later, of course, the individual who was the child might decide to contest the way in which she or he has been gendered. However, that contestation is not an absolutely new formation. It is, rather, a reaction to and a resistance of a structure of gender that was always-already in place and that has already situated and formed the individual in important and indelible ways.

Nevertheless, constructionist theories do make space for such re-formations of gender to occur, unlike essentialist theories, which tend to see gender as embedded in the body and as in effect immutable. Moreover, because constructionism addresses social histories and configurations as well as cultural practices, its theorizations of gender and sexuality, and the relation between them, are more fluid. Put another way, essentialist theory seeks to fix sex, gender, and sexuality as both unchanging and universal, whereas constructionist theory perceives these as historically and culturally specific.

However, this does not mean that constructionist theory bypasses or ignores questions of the body and its workings; to do so would be foolhardy, because, for example, it is clear that biochemical functions such as the production of hormones *can* affect behavior. Rather, constructionism seeks to understand how the culture makes meaning of such behavior and how it valorizes (gives value to) it. For instance, rather than simply accepting that male aggression or violence is inevitable because of the presence of high levels of testosterone in the male body, constructionist theorists ask such questions as: "What value or values in this culture, at this time, are attributed to male aggression and violence?" "Is it possible that male aggression and violence are socially and culturally encouraged, and if so, in what ways, and toward what ends?" "Is aggressive and violent male behavior always produced simply by hormonal influences, or can those influences be triggered by social situations and circumstances?"

Activity 2.2

- Explore and examine the articles and the advertisements in women's or men's magazines:
  - Can you identify any elements of these that can be categorized as generated by either an essentialist or a constructionist understanding of gender?
  - How does such identification affect your understanding of the "gender project" of the publication in question?

The essentialist/constructionist debate is sometimes reductively characterized as the opposition between nature and nurture. The discussion above indicates that the issues are more complex than a simple opposition between body and upbringing. However, these two extremely important factors cannot be overlooked or neglected in a consideration of the ways in which gender is understood and explained by different kinds of theory. The debate itself can be thought of in terms of a tension chiefly between understanding as *ideological* or as *discursive*.

Theories of ideology and of discourse may appear at first sight to be alternate versions of the same thing. Both kinds of theory are *materialist*; that is, both look to social and historical forces as the causes of human behavior and ideas, rather than ascribing these to individual choice, divine Providence, or some other cause external to the social. Both are concerned with the central question of how and why we understand in particular ways the social world we inhabit and our relations with others in that world; and both operate with the key concepts of language, knowledge, and power. However, they think through these issues in significantly different ways, and they have different aims. Finally, both have been powerfully influential in contemporary theorizations of social structures and dynamics, power and its distribution, and, especially for our purposes, gender: much feminist theory, for example, has drawn on Marxist and/or Foucauldian thought.

Contemporary theories of ideology, which derive from the work of Karl Marx, the nineteenth-century German philosopher, historian, and political economist (among other intellectual functions) who took up residence in England, have as their ultimate goal the betterment of society for everyone. This requires an understanding of the way modern, Western social, political, and economic systems work, in order to devise a more equitable distribution of wealth and socioeconomic function. Marx identified capitalism as an oppressive and unjust organization of labor, wealth, and social structure, and believed that revolution that overthrew the entire system was the only remedy.

Current theories of discourse derive from the writings of Michel Foucault, the twentieth-century French philosopher and historian (indeed, he was a philosopher *of* history). Compared with Marxist theorizations and analyses, the Foucauldian elaboration of discursive formations seems less optimistic, even defeatist: concerned with the way power circulates through the social structure and determines our understanding of ourselves and our world, Foucault appears to advocate a resigned acceptance of its workings. However, this is to misunderstand Foucault's project, which is really to alert us to the operations of power upon us, and thereby to encourage us to resist these.

The theorizations of both ideology and discourse are both extensive and complex, and a full account of either is beyond the scope of the present book. Instead, what is presented below is a very much reduced presentation of each, intended as a way of working with an introduction to the theory of masculinity – a sort of "Super-Lite" version of both ideology and discourse. Readers are therefore strongly encouraged to explore ideology and gender further

for themselves (see, for instance, "Suggested further reading" at the end of this chapter).

Ideology and gender

"Ideology" is often misunderstood as signifying a system of belief that is outmoded, clumsy, or different from or opposed to one's own set of beliefs. So, whereas one's own belief system appears self-evident, natural, and "correct," in the sense that all right-thinking people would "of course" agree, the belief system of another person (especially someone of a different background, race or ethnicity, religion, or political affiliation) seems wrong-headed, out of touch with reality, deluded, and/or perverse. However, the theorization of ideology argues not only that the ideology and the structure of *any* society or group are closely connected, but also that *it is impossible to escape ideology*. The very ways we observe and understand, think and talk are not only ideologically saturated but also themselves articulate and circulate ideology.

Catherine Belsey, for example, observes that

> ideology is both a real and an imaginary relation to the world – real in that it is the way in which people really live their relationship to the social relations which govern their conditions of existence, but imaginary in that it discourages a full understanding of these conditions of existence and the ways in which people are socially constituted within them. It is not, therefore, to be thought of as a system of ideas in people's heads, nor as the expression of a higher level of real material relationships, but as the necessary condition of action within the social formation.
>
> (Belsey, 1986: 46)

Put otherwise, ideology develops out of the reality of people's relation to the social: to social classes, their dynamics and relationship to one another; structures of employment and labor; patterns of social interaction; and so on. However, at the same time, ideology overlays and masks that relation so that contradictions, inconsistencies, and inequities are smoothed over and naturalized: "Ideology obscures the real conditions of existence by presenting partial truths. It is a set of omissions, gaps rather than lies, smoothing over contradictions, appearing to provide answers to questions which in reality it evades, and masquerading as coherence …" (Belsey, 1986: 46). Thus, the existence of the members of a society is constituted by the structure of the society and the conditions of existence permitted by that structure, but is framed by "a system of representations (discourses, images, myths) concerning the real relations in which people live" (Belsey, 1986: 46).

However, Belsey warns:

> It is important to stress … that ideology is in no sense a set of deliberate distortions foisted upon a helpless working-class by a corrupt and cynical bourgeoisie (or upon victimized women by violent and power hungry men). If there are groups of sinister men in shirt-sleeves purveying illusions to the public these are not the real makers of ideology. Ideology has no creators in that sense, since it exists necessarily.
>
> (Belsey, 1986: 46)

Ideology, then, emerges out of social structure and the relations of people to that structure, but it *disguises* those relations in order to ensure its own smooth operation. It becomes naturalized, and in turn naturalizes for us our conditions of social existence. It "exists in commonplaces and truisms as well as in philosophical and religious systems. It is apparent in all that is 'obvious' to us," so that the way things appear to be are understood as the way things simply *are*, and have always been (Belsey, 1986: 46).

One powerful agent of ideology is advertising. It ensures continuing sales and thereby also maintains production, of course, but it also preserves and furthers ideology by circulating it through the culture. The aim of the advertising industry is not merely to inform us about what is on offer in the marketplace by way of goods or services for sale, but in fact *to create a need in us as consumers* for these things. Accordingly, therefore, we are made to feel anxious about our looks, our health, our sex appeal, our ability to appear presentable in terms of the latest fashions, our possession of "labor-saving" devices, our apparent wealth (or lack of it), and so on, so that we focus, not on the *real* value of these goods and services in terms of actual need or of the gap between what it cost to produce them and what it costs us to acquire them, but rather on our desire for them, *a desire that is represented to us as real need.*

Advertising operates through *interpellation*, an idea developed by the twentieth-century French Marxist theorist Louis Althusser. He suggests that ideology works by interpellating (that is, "hailing" or addressing) us. However, the "us" (or "me") that ideology addresses must be understood less as an actual identity or individual than a *subject*, an important term in studies in sociology, culture, and gender. Whereas it seems only common sense to understand ourselves as autonomous, unique individuals who, possessing both will and agency, act freely in and on the world around us, theories of ideology (and, as we shall see later, also of discourse) by contrast postulate *that our sense of ourselves* (as autonomous agents possessed of free will) in fact *is shaped for us* by forces beyond our control and, indeed, even beyond our awareness of them. Accordingly, we imagine our own uniqueness and autonomy to be beyond question. However,

> subjectivity isn't a property that we own, but on the contrary we are subjects *of* various agencies. Our individual identity, then, is determined, regulated and reproduced as a structure of relationships. For instance, we may be subjects of (subjected to) parental affection/authority; legal protections/compulsion; commercial enterprise/exploitation; national or cultural characteristics/stereotypes; and so on.
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> (Hartley, 1994b: 309–10)