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Multiple Discourses in Social Life

Laclau and Mouffe elaborate upon Gramsci's concept of hegemony and tease out its logical consequences to give radical new insights into the operation and scope of politics in democratic social life. But their work has been criticised for being a primarily theoretical project whose links to empirical reality are not explicated. For example Hunter (1987:886, 891) argues Laclau and Mouffe rely on "the substantively vacuous category of discursive indeterminacy," "never descending to address particular social contexts" (c.f. Norris 2002, 2006). To address this shortcoming, the current chapter builds on the parts of Laclau and Mouffe's conceptual terrain, introduced and developed in the previous chapter, by examining and theorising two crucial issues. Firstly, Laclau and Mouffe argue that social life is not a bounded space which can be occupied by a principle that exists across the entire space. In other words, social life has no 'centre', no 'top' from which power flows down, and no single source of social order. Rather, social life is conducted within a plurality of discourses: multiple patterns of meaningful actions

become sedimented into social structures. Many discourses currently exist, and the range of potential discourses is infinite.

If this is so, how do multiple discourses operate side by side in social life, how is the range of discourses which are present at a social site selected, and how do people shift back and forwards across discourses? An account which satisfies these questions is offered in Section 1.

Secondly, if social life occurs as multiple simultaneous discourses, what conception of self-identity fits such a view? More specifically, how do individuals become involved in discourses at all, how do people select which discourses become crucial for their identity, and how do they handle several discourses at once in social action? An abbreviated account of identity is offered in Section 2.

Multiple discourses in social action

My conclusion in the previous chapter is that the Connellian framework describes not the entire terrain of gender in social life but rather a specific discourse in which gender is a major ingredient – the discourse of masculine authority. The various sorts of 'men' (and 'women') theorized in the Connellian framework are not commensurable with actual embodied persons but rather are subject positions within the discourse Connell identifies. In addition I sketched how some principal feminist discourses were created initially from subject positions within the masculine authority discourse and these subject positions were then stabilised as nodal points of their own discourses. These sketches were focusing on the internal workings of discourses and how new discourses are created.

But if the Connellian framework is more usefully seen as only one discourse of gender, what is the relation between this discourse and other discourses of gender or indeed other discourses with any content? The relative priority or predominance of any discourse is constantly contested in everyday social interaction, and Laclau and Mouffe's principal point, presented in Chapter 3, is that there is in fact no social mechanism which guarantees in advance that a specific discourse will permanently predominate and thus have the capacity to ultimately determine the shape of the social field in which it operates. Undoubtedly attempts are constantly made to secure a specific discourse as fully specifying all social relations at a particular social site, and these attempts are frequently successful, at least momentarily. In this section I set out a way to view and conceptualise the simultaneous operation of multiple discourses in social life.

Perhaps a paradigmatic example of one discourse predominating is in a law court, where the discourse of 'the law' plays a major role, connecting the personnel in a legal case in specified ways to each other and to all the law's massive infrastructure and executive resources. But although within the court the capacity of the discourse of the law is immense, there is an internal recognition within the law that other levels of social interaction may at any moment intrude upon the court's ordered workings. Various procedural rules enable the judge to in effect 'trump' or override other levels of action, for example by halting argument between counsel or preventing counsel questioning witnesses 'improperly,' by silencing the audience, and so on. But this procedural power applies only during events which come under the purview of 'the law', as the example of the broken air conditioning illustrates. In other words despite its predominant position within the action in a law court the capacity of the discourse of 'the law' to fully specify all the relations and operations occurring at the site of that court is restricted to specific parts of the action occurring.

More significantly, at moments when the predominance of the law is invoked, for example when the judge berates a noisy member of the gallery, such action does not close out or prevent the continuing existence of the myriad other levels of action, although considerable effort may be expended by participants to give the appearance that this is so. Thus the judge's admonishment does not prevent some members of the jury continuing to be anxious about lunch, nor prevent the barristers from continuing to attempt to manipulate judicial feeling and opinion, though these actions may be momentarily suspended.

An existing theory conceptualising the variety of levels of action in our example of the courtroom is Erving Goffman's (1974) 'frame analysis'. Much of Goffman's research was detailed observation of people interacting in ordinary social situations, and he is perhaps best known for his "dramaturgical analogy" – the insight that people present a self in much the same way as actors present a theatrical play's character (Goffman 1959). Although at first glance this work has little application to large-scale social processes, Goffman later came to the view that people organise their experience of social life by 'framing' every interaction. Goffman's concept of 'frame' has some overlap with the concept of discourse developed in this thesis, and I will use Goffman's concept to bridge the gap between Laclau and Mouffe's theory and practical reality.

Goffman (1974:8) defines a 'frame' as follows:

> [W]hen individuals attend to any current situation they face the question "what is it that is going on here?" … the answer to it is presumed by the way the individuals then proceed to get on with the affairs at hand.

The question of "what is … going on here?" is often tacit but may be explicitly asked "in times of confusion and doubt" (Goffman 1974:8), for example when we discover we have been conned. The momentary answer to the question is the 'frame' in which we organise our experience.

Frames can be closely related to each other. Examples which Goffman explores are the relation between 'play' and 'the real thing', simulations of real events for the purposes of training, and theatrical performances of actual events. There can be multiple layers or 'laminations' (Goffman 1974:156) from the original frame. For example a drag performance relies on widely held notions of standard masculine and feminine garb and behaviour (the primary frame). What is entertaining about drag is that the audience is privy to the performer being a man *performing* a woman (a lamination of the original gender frame), revealing the extent to which gender itself is a performance in everyday life. But further laminations are possible: in the performance the performer's woman character may be called upon to 'impersonate' a man (a second lamination), and may do so with frequent asides to the audience (a third) intended to highlight the comedic aspects of the situation. Of course performers must rehearse these routines (a fourth), and rehearsals usually involve discussions between actors and directors, stage hands and other professional staff (a fifth lamination).

All this action proceeds on the commonplace assumption that the participants can keep track of these multiple laminations of the primary frame with minimal competence, simply by collaborating in providing and following cues to signal shifts between laminations.

However the question of which frame is 'primary' is contingent: the example of a drag performance used here starts with the notion of gender. But a drama teacher involved in rehearsals will have a completely different primary framework, while in Judith Butler's analysis of drag (1990:174-180) the primary framework may be feminist theory. From the viewpoint of social organisation the important question is whether the participants' views workably dovetail with each other.

Goffman's 1974 essay deals mainly with the ways in which layers of frames relate to each other. But the many frames in a social situation need have no inherent relationship with each other at all. Indeed the incidental way in which one set of events

acts merely as a context for another set of events is extremely common in social life. In the example of law courts, jury members often find jury duty to be an inconvenient and emotionally demanding disruption to what is to them their 'real' lives. Likewise, the mundane drama of lunch continues for nearly everyone irrespective of events before and after it. In other words the frames of activity which simultaneously occur at a given social site have no structurally necessary relation to each other simply because they are temporally contiguous.

Goffman's frame analysis shows how normally competent people manage multiple frames in interaction, including managing the nested layerings of frames to produce the complex interweaving of multiple frames which make up most social interaction. Pertinent to my argument here, Goffman helpfully explicates a variety of techniques by which those present give interactional priority to one or a small number of discourses while momentarily edging off other discourses to the wings of interaction. And this momentary relegation to the wings is highly contextual: the question of the judicial lunch is appropriately primary in the café during the recess.

Goffman's argument about experience being organised in frames is well substantiated, but he stops short at extending frame analysis to the social level. Goffman claims to be focusing on experience, that is, his analytic focus is upon the inner worlds of individuals. He explicitly "make(s) no claim whatsoever to be talking about the core matters of sociology – social organisation and social structure." (1974:13). However his notion of frame rests in the possibility of creating a specific meaning (the idea originally comes from James (1869/1950) and Schutz (1945), see discussion Goffman 1974:2-5), which is in itself a fundamentally social undertaking organised within the structure of language, itself a shared social project.

Despite this promising social foundation to the concept of frames, Goffman offers no account of how frames come into being in the first place, nor of how or why specific frames attain the traction they do in social life. And although Goffman implies that the limits to the lamination of frames is in the extent to which such nested laminations remain intelligible to participants, he does not examine the question of how many frames may already exist or possibly exist in the future.

It is precisely at the intersection where individual experience meets social organisation that meaning comes into play. Meaning is in essence a shared project, in the sense that meaning does not reside in objects but rather resides entirely in language

(Schutz 1962 Vol 1:231), as we have seen in Saussure's distinction between sign and signified (Saussure 1916/1977, see also discussion Chapter 4). Laclau and Mouffe (1985) build upon this basic insight to explore the process of the creation of new meanings by manipulating the tension between equivalence and difference (see Chapter 4 for discussion). A new meaning is different to existing meanings in specified ways, yet relies on equivalences with those existing meanings for its own coherence.

Laclau and Mouffe argue there is a political dimension to meaning in that people have some motivation to create new meanings. In other words in the creation of new meanings there is something at stake: not only can reality be apprehended and engaged with in new ways; in addition entities may also have interests in either promoting or resisting these new ways.

But meanings in themselves do not create the material realities of social life; they are immaterial. It is only when we *take action* on the basis of a specific meaning that social life is impacted by that meaning. And the point where meanings are acted upon is the point where there is substantial overlap between Goffman's concept of frame and Laclau and Mouffe's concept of discourse. Goffman's definition of frame is the momentary answer to the question "what is it that is going on here?". In Laclau and Mouffe's account of discourses, a discourse takes on its recognisable coherence through its nodal point – or, in my terms, people must accept that the discourse's nodal statement about the world is relevant for themselves in the current social action (even though the nodal point's relevance may be lie in their desire to refute it).

The overlap between Goffman and Laclau and Mouffe is in the recognition of the significance of meaning for how people understand current social action and, more importantly, *what people do* in social action. Goffman's strength lies in his description of frames from the observation of the minutiae of practical social action. But although Laclau and Mouffe are admittedly vague on practical application, their work is a considerable *conceptual* advance over Goffman's. Goffman conceptualises meanings to be held in frames whose creation is not investigated. Laclau and Mouffe conceptualise meaning contained in discourses, and offer an account of their creation. Laclau and Mouffe also offer an account of the force involved in the creation and application of meanings in social life: an entity (that is, a person, a group, a nation) that is able to develop and stabilise new meanings into a discourse is able to exercise hegemony (that is,

leadership with the potential for sanctions) within the terrain of meaningful actions encompassed by that discourse.

The key point I wish to make in this section is that despite the force of hegemony, any one discourse does not preclude or prevent other discourses. When a primary frame such as the discourse of 'the law' in a law court is evoked using legitimate devices, what is happening is that the primary frame is being allocated priority in the action by the people present, rather than that primary frame excluding or closing down other discourses. The other discourses present at that site continue to occur, and continue to be as real for the participants as the primary frame. This means that those 'lesser' discourses remain available to participants even if those lesser discourses are momentarily sidelined or allocated lower priority: the discourses continue their existence but their relative position in relation to the primary frame of the court is constantly being shuffled around and played with as the action within the site of the court unfolds.

Goffman's frame analysis shows there is a multiplicity of discourses always present, and that there is a complex interweaving and layering of discourses which is continuously and successfully managed by the participants of social sites. But there is a more relevant question regarding the Connellian framework: Connell claims that his elucidation of gender relations arising from the association of masculinity and authority is exactly the same as describing the entire terrain of gender relations – in other words Connell does not view the phenomena observed through his analytic lens as a discourse among many but as a complete description of the whole terrain of gender. In contrast I suggest that the pattern of relations Connell describes is one discourse in the terrain of gender. Certainly masculine authority is a discourse which claims for itself the pre-eminent position in the terrain of gender. But this, I argue, only remains a claim rather than a fully realised actuality.

Extensive discourses such as the law and masculine authority undoubtedly shape social life in concrete ways, for example law courts do hear legal cases alongside all the other social activities they host, and the discourse of masculine authority does generate social formations which benefit men. But this capacity to shape social life is a collective project which is able to proceed only because these discourses' nodal points are extensively accepted. However the legitimacy of the nodal point which links authority and masculinity has been substantially challenged by feminist discourses, and these challenges have been gradually increasing in their scope and traction since Wollstonecraft

(1792/1975). It cannot be doubted that historically the masculine authority discourse has had a great deal more reach and operated as a primary frame at many more social sites and in many more moments than is true today: for example it used to be illegal for women to own money or property, to vote and to hold certain jobs, and immoral for them to be educated or to choose to be childless. However the reach and traction of the masculine authority discourse has been, through a great deal of feminist and other social action, gradually reducing, and this is possible precisely because the discourse does not have and never did have the extensive shaping capacity Connell claims for it. Certainly it continues to be a highly significant and extensively available discourse, in some circumstances operating as a primary frame. But it continually exists in the flow of social process as one discourse among many, all of which have their own reality, traction and resources, and all of which shape the social formulations of gender as we know it.

Multiple discourses in identity

The previous section examines how multiple discourses exist broadly in social life. Another crucial question is how multiple discourses exist in the life of individual persons, and in this section I offer a conceptualisation linking discourses with personal identity.

Goffman shows how social interactions exist within 'frames', and some of the business of mutually creating an interaction involves contestation and agreement among those present as to the frame of the moment. To enable me to present my concept of personal identity I will describe an imaginary scenario, when the plumbing springs a leak at my home and I call on my neighbour John the plumber to fix it. I may only know my neighbour as a plumber; I may not have spoken to him as a neighbour but we know each other by sight. The interaction in this case can be relatively simple. I've never called him before so the frame of our interaction involves two positions, 'plumber' and 'customer'.

But if we already know each other as neighbours, as 'John' and 'David', then when I call him I have to indicate that I wish to shift frames to the plumber/customer frame. In this case we are setting up two frames to operate conjointly, the neighbours frame and the plumbing frame. Perhaps there is some little negotiation while John offers a freebie as a neighbour, which also has implications about developing our 'neighbour' relation towards 'friends' – or maybe not: do I want to be under some friendship obligation to him, which would in effect introduce a new frame in the interaction? Perhaps, to complicate matters, John's wife and my wife are friends already, as well as

neighbours, in which case John and I can also interact using the widely available masculinity frame 'blokes whose wives are friends'.

This scenario enables a discussion about identity in relation to discourses. Already in the scenario there are several frames. In the previous section I argued these frames can also be understood also as discourses in the sense used by Laclau and Mouffe. In our plumbing drama, each discourse or frame entails at least two subject positions. Note that even a simple interaction will involve multiple discourses so that each person occupies more than one subject position. As observed in the previous section Goffman usefully records how normally competent social actors manage these multiple subject positions and their related interactional frames or discourses. When we consider this plumbing drama is of very limited duration and reach, then across each person's life there may be dozens or even hundreds of subject positions, some of which are extremely major and others of which are fleeting or highly contingent. The more major subject positions are major because we have a significant personal investment in them, while some of the other subject positions may be taken up only opportunistically.

Taken all together this view gives a picture of identity as made up of multiple subject positions, which Chantal Mouffe describes in this way:

> We can thus conceive the social agent as constituted by an ensemble of 'subject positions' that can never be totally fixed in a closed system of differences, constructed by a diversity of discourses among which there is no necessary relation... The 'identity' of such a multiple and contradictory subject is therefore always contingent and precarious, temporarily fixed at the intersection of those subject positions and dependent on specific forms of identification (Mouffe 1993:77).

Mouffe's description here is characteristic of a kind of "discursive indeterminacy" of which Hunter (1987) and others are rightly critical (see, for example, the opening remarks of this chapter). However this can be readily remedied. A more adequate definition of identity is of this multiplicity of *subject positions cohering around the physical continuity of our bodies*. This bodily aspect of identity is in fact crucial for social coherence: without the material presence of a body, Mouffe's 'ensemble' account of identity provides no cohering aspect to identity which enables us to be called to account for our actions. If we were truly just a collection of subject positions 'among which there is no necessary relation' then the way would be open for one subject position to deny the actions taken in another subject position. But Mouffe is not saying this. She merely does not mention bodies or continuity. As in her work with Laclau her task is not to theorise

material reality but rather to develop an argument about the current operation of politics in social life. What she does say in the above quote is that there is no necessary relation among the *discourses* in which 'our' subject positions have their existence. In other words 'my' various subject positions come to the fore and recede in social action depending on the initiatives I and the co-present others take.

However some subject positions have more extensive reach and traction for a person than others. Some subject positions, such as, for me, 'David Bloodwood', 'man', 'theorist', 'gender activist', and so on, are highly significant. I spend a great deal of time occupying those positions, and they are frequently in play in most of my social interactions. But this high frequency is true only in certain social contexts. For example when travelling in South-East Asia a quite different set of subject positions may suddenly become significant: 'Australian', 'white', 'wealthy', 'childless', and so on.

In terms of theorising social life, following Mouffe (1993) I am proposing here that the 'subject positions' making up the ensemble of an identity are the very same 'subject positions' which articulate in Laclau and Mouffe's discourses. And, following my argument in the previous section with respect to discourses, one subject position cannot predominate to the extent of being more real than all the other subject positions making up the ensemble of their identity. Certainly in specific situations one subject position may predominate: at work one's specific organisational location and functions are primary above other subject positions – but only in the same way as a social site's primary frame is primary. Other subject positions occur simultaneously, and can and do come to the fore even if momentarily.

Importantly, the existence of multiple subject positions gives individuals the opportunity to express a variety of human potentials and capacities. Bodily potential and capacities are also inputs to the creation of identity[1], as are our mental capacities for imagination and identifying patterns[2]. We tend to see a familiar pattern of events as not simply a pattern which may or may not occur again. Rather, we take the familiar pattern

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[1] Connell's concept of body-reflexive practice (1995:60-64) usefully describes one part of how bodily reality and experience are taken up: a circuit occurs which iteratively links bodily interaction with other bodies, the direct experience of this action/interaction, and the cultural/social meanings we make of and ascribe to this experience. These meanings then become ingredients in further bodily actions/interactions, generating further direct experiences, and so on.

[2] Giddens (1984) argues that a significant aspect of social life is the generation of 'ontological security' – that is, routines and predictable patterns which provide practical limits to the open-endedness of imagination. In principle anything may happen next, and in principle I may respond in any way at all. In practice we arrange our lives so that we can predict with reasonable certainty what will happen next, and our responses to events follow patterns which are largely familiar to us.

to *mean* 'me' or 'normal life' - so that if/when the pattern is disrupted we experience an identity crisis of some sort, even if it's as minor as when we expect the electricity supply to be continuously available and are momentarily disconcerted when a blackout occurs. In other words we become emotionally attached to specific subject positions partly because they provide us with familiar meanings about ourselves and the events in our lives, and partly because they link us with familiar patterns of action and repertoires of how to proceed. We know who we are partly because we know what to do in familiar situations.

Despite the vast bulk of social life occurring in familiar patterns, and the majority of our time as individuals being spent occupying a small number of subject positions, these familiar subject positions cannot necessarily be relied upon to be continuously stable. To illustrate this I will bring forward an example from the previous chapter, in which I discussed the emergence, from a patriarchal discourse, of a new discourse of feminism concerned with the issue of women's rationality and access to education. In that example I noted the existence of three different discourses and thus a slightly different meaning relevant to the subject position 'men' (and 'women') in each of the discourses. The meaning of 'men' shifts across the discourses from 'natural authorities' in one discourse, to 'educated in rationality' in the second, to 'illegitimate oppressors' in the third.

What is noteworthy here is that the same *label* 'men' is used across all three discourses, but the politics and relative legitimacy of that same label is determined by the meaning-frame or discourse to which it is attached. Each discourse invokes its own meanings and its own subject positions, and coheres a unique range of articulations between its subject positions, even though there is a 'men' and a 'women' in each discourse. There is thus the potential for participants in an interaction to *reframe* the interaction by seeking to foreground a preferred discourse. All the discourses in this example contain the paired subject positions 'men' and 'women', and because of this continuity across the labels of the paired subject positions the action can readily proceed between the actual persons present, but the shift of discursive frames opens up new avenues for meaningful action by the participants while closing down others.[3]

On this account a very significant process in social interaction is disputes over which discourse/frame is foregrounded. Disputation over frames is itself a significant

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[3] See Goffman (1974:345-7) for discussion about the relation between meaning and the actions of participants.

strategic move in interactions, and we can deploy this strategy at any moment to shift frames. In the example of my neighbour the plumber and myself there is a high degree of co-operation between the participants regarding the frames in which the action proceeds. But there need not be co-operation: we may conduct the entire interaction without having agreed on whether this is a neighbour/friendly freebie, leaving the door open for future indignation by one or other party when a bill is sent (or not sent).

This section offers a conceptualisation of identity as a set of subject positions with which we become familiar as part of a 'me'. A crucial question in this approach is how specific subject positions become 'familiarised' or incorporated into 'me'. This question is especially important in regard to fostering progressive change among men, since arguably if change is to be both durable and substantial it must become incorporated by men at some deep personal level. Due to limitations of space and time this thesis does not theorise the processes at the individual level by which such incorporation occurs. However the fact that these processes do in fact occur can be illustrated by discussing what happens when we are faced with an entirely new situation: for example, sudden serious personal illness, the death of a loved one, or travel in a foreign culture.

These examples of a new situation are sufficient to show that substantial change can and does occur at the level of identity to the extent at least that entirely unfamiliar subject positions can be located and taken up. In all these examples we are commonly offered 'help' by others around us who are both familiar with the frame and with people who are unfamiliar with the frame, such as ambulance officers or health professionals, undertakers or older family members, and operators of tourist services. Despite this help it is very common to take some time – weeks or months – to gradually incorporate this new set of circumstances into our life and gain a competent "feel for the game" (Bourdieu 1990:66) which enables us to proceed in interactions without much conscious effort.

The examples I have just referred to all commonly occur, which means that even if such a situation is new to one person there will be many people for whom it is not new at all. But another set of circumstances which are likely to be new for everybody is innovative social change, whether that be new laws, new technology, new policies or new social movements. In such a situation all the people who engage with the new discourses are faced with developing ways to incorporate their subject positions into identity and, indeed, must develop the new subject positions from scratch. An example of this process in relation to a new technology is the invention and marketing of the Sony Walkman (du

Gay 1997), showing the extensive institutional resources devoted to sketching new subject positions for potential consumers and disseminating them through marketing and advertising. The development of government programs for the delivery of services is another instance where institutional resources are directed towards sketching new subject positions for service recipients. O'Malley's (1996) account of a Western Australian Government program to deliver services to Aboriginal communities, and Callon's (1986) account of the scallops of St Brieuc Bay shows that the new subject positions must be actively and to some extent willingly taken up by their targets. Hence the possibility always exists that new subject positions will be taken up in unexpected ways or will be rejected entirely.

These examples all refer to discourses in which extensive institutional support is readily available. However new social movements rarely have access to institutional resources, at least in their initial stages. While this makes the extension of their new discourses much slower and more difficult, at the same time there is much greater scope for personal and social creativity in the creation of subject positions and the content of nodal points. Such is the case, I suggest, with discourses of substantial progressive change among men.

A major advantage of the conceptualisation of identity presented here is that it enables analysis of men at a more complex level of detail. Specifically, a view of identity as an ensemble of subject positions allows for the possibility that a man who in many respects appears closely aligned with hegemonic masculinity may also have in his identity other deeply valued subject positions through which he is subordinated or marginalised. An example spectacularly displayed in the media recently is Max Mosley, the (now former) president of the Fédération Internationale de l'Automobile (FIA), who likes going home and being beaten by women. This intimate fact about a public figure was revealed (with video screen grabs) to both the public and his family in a March 2008 newspaper article headed "F1 Boss has Sick Nazi Orgy with Five Hookers", and subsequently further discussed in the English High Court in 2009 (Mack 2009). The conjunction of publicly legitimated power alongside humiliation in private can be explained as Mosley shifting from one discourse to another, and each discourse has it own subject positions with distinctive power relations among them. Mosley was using his wealth to pay mega-dollars for prostitutes, and one analysis of the power relations amongst the parties can be construed as yet another demonstration of male privilege.

While this well-known discourse is certainly present, there are obviously several other significant discourses also operating in his life: not only those that sustain his public privilege but also those that sustain his sexuality, his relationship with his wife, his relationships with the prostitutes, his discourse of self-identity, how he manages the public/private terrain, and so on.

Each discourse in which a person takes up a subject position has a coherence and integrity of its own which can be examined for itself. Max Mosley in some areas of his life occupies a subject position that looks very much like hegemonic masculinity. He clearly enjoys this and benefits from its privileges. But conceptually it is not coherent to privilege this one subject position and its discourse to the extent of dismissing Mosley's other subject positions as trivial when they may be of major value to the man himself. The discourse in which Mosley is ritually humiliated is clearly enormously significant for him personally, as evidenced by the large financial cost of the sex play, by the elaborate concealments from his wife and colleagues, and by the risk to his chairmanship of FIA (O'Connor & Gorman 2008). And he enrolls some of the benefits of hegemonic masculinity in order to create opportunities for him to occupy this subordinate position. In addition his hegemonic masculinity position means the possibility of exposure is potentially more costly for him because of the potential loss of his public position.

The identity of Max Mosley, then, can be seen as a complex terrain of privilege and vulnerability, power and subordination. Despite its complexity the terrain of identity is nevertheless amenable to analysis as an ensemble of subject positions whose relation to each other is contingent in the sense that individuals form the ensemble in ways which are personally workable and largely independent of the constraints arising from within any one subject position.

The goal of this section has been to offer a conceptualisation of identity as a familiar set of subject positions. These enable us to encounter a wide variety of social situations and a range of discursive frames in each situation, and to engage with and incorporate entirely new situations and new subject positions into identity. This conceptualisation allows analytical moves in two directions: on the one hand by cohering identity around the continuity of our bodies it points to intrapsychic processes of individuals (conceptualisations of which are not developed in this thesis), and on the other hand by formulating identity as a collection of subject positions it points to social-scale phenomena.

Multiple discourses and progressive change

Regarding fostering progressive change among men, the two issues I deal with in this chapter dovetail with each other to paint a picture of broad-scale social life and individual identity as patterned and structured, but with myriad discontinuities from which change is a permanent possibility. A conceptualisation of identity which is able to encompass privilege and marginalisation within an individual man opens the possibility to identify and highlight the benefits potentially available even for greatly privileged men if they become involved in progressive change. In other words, the conceptualisation of identity as an ensemble of subject positions offers a theoretical shift away from the "catch" in progressive change which Connell believes to reside with "heterosexual men" who suuposedly are wholly devoted to "the defence of patriarchy" (1987:xiii). This is not to imply that Max Mosley, the example I use in the previous section, is involved in progressive change. Indeed, his response to the media 'outing' of his sexual tastes was to use the powers conventionally available to him as a wealthy white man to seek redress against the media in court. The purpose of using the example of Mosley is to illustrate the multiplicity in the identities of powerful men, and especially that powerful men's lives can involve vulnerabilities. As Roper and Tosh (1991:15) observe, "the very process of acquiring social dominance may be subjectively experienced as oppression," and this oppressive aspect for socially authorised men can be emphasised in order to portray the benefits to men of progressive change[4].

Connell is certainly aware that some individual men find the oppressive aspects of masculinity are sufficiently great to motivate personal change (see, for example, 1987:xiii; 1995:Ch 5). In addition Connell suggests that individual change is of only limited effectiveness without a "collective practice" (1995:139). But unfortunately he offers no theorisation for such a collective practice. In contrast, the theorisation of multiple discourses in both social action and identity points to the *systemic* nature of the marginalisations involved in masculine authority's subject position 'men' (that is, Connell's hegemonic masculinity and complicit masculinities) which also operate in identity when people take up that subject position. This theorisation suggests that these systemic marginalisations can be hegemonised into a focus of *collective* action among men which benefits them directly but which need not, as Connell insists, inevitably lead to a reassertion of patriarchal dominance.

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[4] Kaufman (1994) offers a similar point, focusing on 'men's pain'.

The discussion in this chapter is based on Laclau and Mouffe's insight that social life cannot be theorised as having a centre, a single source of order or existing as a closed definable space. I have offered an account of how multiplicity is dealt with and experienced in social action, and how multiplicity makes up self-identity. However before applying the multi-discourse view directly to the Connellian framework some other issues will be clarified in the next chapter. Firstly, how do new discourses emerge? I will examine this and offer some examples from the work of other writers. Secondly, given the significance of the notion of 'domination' in the Connellian framework, I will develop a clearer picture of the distinction between the empirically discoverable aspect of domination and the political aspect. Finally, the notion of 'hegemony' is even more crucial in Connell's theorisation of masculinity/ies, and I will crystallise the view of hegemony emerging from my theoretical work so far in the thesis.