STUDYING SOCIAL POWER IN TEXTUAL DATA: COMBINING TOOLS FOR ANALYZING MEANING AND POSITIONING

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Abstract

Texts are language excerpts produced from specific points of view; they communicate specific worldviews and values. This implies that social science research on power in texts can benefit from an analysis of the perspective from which a story is presented. Nevertheless, discussion of concrete tools for doing this at the level of practical analysis is uncommon. In this article, I discuss an approach that takes account of positioning at two different levels of analysis: the position from which a story is told and positioning within a story. My central argument is that it is advantageous to combine tools for analyzing positioning with tools for analyzing meaning because this allows for a more detailed analysis of social power in texts and for a more detailed description of the analytical process. I use empirical examples from a project on Swedish newspaper debate on gender and alcohol in 1979 and 1995 as illustrations. Although the analytical tools I demonstrate were assembled to study gender, I argue that they are useful in analyzing other dimensions of social power as well, and that they can inform part of the process of intersectional analysis.

Introduction

In most disciplines in the social sciences, analyzing social power is a central concern. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003: 228) argue that "one of the basic things language does is allow us to label categories" and such categorization plays an important role in the production and reproduction of social power relationships (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 2003). Texts, in turn, are language excerpts produced from specific points of view and communicate specific worldviews and values, as recognized in communications studies (e.g., Fiske, 1990) and discourse analysis (e.g., Fairclough 2003; Foucault 1979; Laclau & Mouffe 1985). For this reason, texts may play a part in the production and reproduction of social power (Fairclough 2003).

The fact that texts are produced from specific points of view implies that social science research on power in texts can benefit from an analysis of the perspective of the presentation of a story. Still, discussion of concrete and specific tools for doing this at the level of practical analysis is unusual. In the current article, I discuss an approach that specifies two different levels for analyzing positioning in texts: the position from which a story is told and positioning within a story (Sulkunen & Törrönen 1997). I argue that while this approach draws on a sometimes complex discussion of semiotics and narrative analysis, it is still useful to social scientists working more broadly with discourse analysis. This article attempts to show how.

Furthermore, while studying positioning in itself may be one way of analyzing the meaning of texts, I argue that distinguishing tools for studying positioning from tools for studying meaning allows for greater analytical clarity. Broadly defined, analyzing meaning refers to the study of people's interpretations and understandings of specific phenomena, experiences, actions and events and this involves analyzing interpretations of interpretations as acknowledged, e.g., in a thick description, to use Geertz's (1973) term: "…what we call

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our data are really our own constructions of other people's constructions of what they and their compatriots are up to…" (Geertz 1973: 9), and in phenomenology's first and second-order constructs (Schütz 1962). Discourse analysis includes several slightly different approaches to the study of meaning in texts; for example, Fairclough (1992) suggests that researchers combine linguistic tools for studying meaning at the textual level with micro-sociological theories for studying interaction and macro-sociological theories for studying social practice. In the present article, I discuss a number of tools for studying meaning at intermediate levels of abstraction, i.e. tools that focus on the analysis of texts but that do not deal with interaction as such (as in studying turn-taking, the role of silence, the notion of speakerhood). These tools are less detailed and specific than most of the linguistic tools but more detailed and specific than the general sociological perspectives that Fairclough (1992) discusses.

Aims

The purpose of this article is to discuss a set of concrete tools for the analysis of meaning and the analysis of positioning in texts. I argue that combining these sets of tools allows for a more detailed analysis of social power in texts and for a more detailed description of the analytical process. Consequently, I focus on how the tools work together and complement each other. To illustrate this, I use empirical examples from a project on Swedish newspaper debates on gender and alcohol in 1979 and 1995.

Clearly, the analytical tools discussed in this paper don't exist in a vacuum. Although there are subtle differences between the methodological frameworks of each tool (e.g., in the details of how they conceptualize the relationship between ontology and epistemology), they all share a point of departure in which interpretation, meaning-making and language are central to how people produce and experience reality. Thus, in all frameworks, meanings and

discourses are conceptualized as social. For this reason, I mainly consider the tools from the perspective of their usefulness and exclude discussion about the details of the methodological frameworks. Further, although I assembled the tools for the purpose of studying gender, I argue that they are not specific to gender analysis, but are equally suitable for studying other dimensions of social power. The tools may also inform part of the process of intersectional analysis. Before turning to the analytical tools, I briefly discuss the concepts of discourse, power and intersectionality and how they relate to the research focus and to data collection.

Discourse, classification and power

In general, I define discourses as "ways of representing aspects of the world" (Fairclough 2003: 124). Discourses play a part in constituting ways of being as well as social and personal identities (Fairclough 2003). One of the ways this happens is by categorization, or classification, in texts.[1] As people read and interpret texts, they become aware of how they and others are positioned in these representations. As Hacking (1999: 31) puts it: "Ways of classifying human beings interact with the human beings who are classified. … classifications do not exist only in the empty space of language but in institutions, practices, material interactions with things and other people". Further, categorization is a relational practice; categories are often defined by excluding what does not belong to the category (e.g., 'woman' implies the exclusion of 'man'). I argue that categorization in itself isn't necessarily always problematic or oppressive, but specific ways of categorizing – e.g., "broad and sweeping acts of categorization" as McCall (2005: 1779) puts it – that exclude relevant differences and situational factors, may be. In various different approaches to intersectionality, underlining the complexity of social categories is a common focus. Researchers using the concept of intersectionality share the recognition that, e.g., research based exclusively on gender doesn't

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[1] 'Positions' may refer to general social categories or to subject positions at lower levels of abstraction. I will return to this issue when discussing the tools for analyzing positioning within stories.

adequately "account for lived experience at neglected points of intersection – ones that tended to reflect multiple subordinate positions as opposed to dominant or mixed locations" (McCall 2005: 1780). In texts, categorization may involve one-dimensional classification (e.g., according to gender or social class or ethnicity), but it may also involve the classification of people at specific intersections (e.g., "women refugees"). Both one-dimensional categories and categories at intersections may be described in broad and sweeping – and therefore potentially problematic – terms that reproduce power relations. How, then, is categorization linked to power relations "outside" the text?

Particular textual representations of the world may become hegemonic; they can appear inevitable and stable and not the product of a specific social order that could be changed (Fairclough 2003). In this way, discourses contribute to people seeing specific ways of representing the world and specific ways of categorizing (including the characteristics associated with a specific category) as inevitable and unchangeable. In turn, these worldviews and categorizations make specific ways of acting appear possible and others impossible or difficult. For example, a discourse positing sexual difference as the basis for dividing social tasks makes it appear natural that women are ultimately responsible for home and children. At the same time, it makes other ways of dividing care and household tasks between people appear more problematic. The concept of hegemony also indicates that there are always ongoing struggles over the power to represent the world in a particular way, and this means that at every point in time there are (several) opposing discourses that may potentially become dominant (Laclau & Mouffe 1985). Furthermore, people make meanings not only by accepting, negotiating or rejecting specific positions within discourses; they may also creatively refine the meaning of a position and produce new meanings. Thus, discourses affect people's worldviews and potential for action but do not determine them. In the present article,

this way of understanding discourse is my point of departure when I discuss the analytical tools, but it also has consequences for the research focus and data collection.

Research focus and data collection: capturing relations between categories

A first observation is that studying "contrasting" positions is central to a relational analysis of social power (cf McCall 2005). With regard to gender, this means studying how texts talk about both women and men. For example, if we know that texts position women as (future) mothers in issues surrounding drinking, while they position men as perpetrators of violence when drunk, we have a better basis for our discussion of gender relations than if we only know that the texts position women as (future) mothers. In discussing social power, we could argue that these positions contribute to the reproduction of gender as a binary category of opposites which describes women as responsible for children and men as violent and dangerous (and that this potentially excludes that men may be responsible for children and women may be violent, etc.). To analyze whether categorization is broad and sweeping, one may focus on, for example, whether there is only one specific position available in the texts under study or whether texts position individuals (e.g., women and men) in more than one way. For example, are women only talked about as mothers, and are men only portrayed as violent? This applies similarly to relational categories relevant to various other dimensions of social power.

While decisions about what data to collect have to be made in the context of a specific research project (see Titscher et al 2000, for a discussion), a general problem is that data needs to be rich enough to allow for a study of relations among categories. Short texts are often less interesting, particularly because such texts usually contain little detail. For example, notices and telegrams often only mention categories, stating that "women generally drink less than men do", or "alcohol abuse among women increases". Items of this kind may be used in

an analysis of whether a category of people is a "marked category" (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 2003), but it is difficult to use them to study the characteristics that are ascribe to, for example, women drinkers. In conclusion, rich stories that discuss the issue at length and in especially explicit, clear and elaborated ways are more amenable to an analysis of positioning and meaning.

Analytical tools: meaning and positioning in studying social power

Following a chronology of analytical work, I first present the tools for studying meaning and then the tools for studying positioning. In the combination of tools that I suggest, the analysis of positioning builds on the initial analysis of meaning. However, after the initial stages of analysis, the tools are used simultaneously, in a back and forth movement.

<u>Studying meaning in texts: close reading and distancing techniques</u>

"Closeness" is a theme in several qualitative approaches to analysis. In anthropology and other disciplines where fieldwork is a common method of data collection, closeness is often related to the issue of "going native" (see, e.g., Giulianotti 1995; Kanuha 2000; Lindquist 1995; Monti 1992). In this sense of the term, the researcher is part of a context and may thus come close to the research participants in several ways. He or she may share the same physical and social space with them, get to know them, identify with them, adopt their perspectives, and so on. Closeness is sometimes discussed in this way in interview contexts as well (the interviewer's relation with the interviewees; e.g., Kvale 1996). This form of closeness may be both a problem (as in the <u>risk</u> of "going native") and a preferred method (the researcher sharing participants' life-world is a prerequisite for understanding).

In the present context, I discuss closeness from the perspective of textual analysis. Closeness here refers to an initial common-sense approach to the meaning of texts: as a

member of a particular society at a particular point in time, there are certain meanings and discourses that are part of my everyday life, and, like all members of this society, I make use of these meanings and discourses when interpreting a text. In the present context, I refer to this as 'close reading', an aspect of interpretation that <u>starts out</u> with the researcher's initial and immediate, common sense-based understanding of what a text means. There are a few similarities between the tool of close reading and the approach to qualitative analysis called schema analysis (see Ryan & Bernard 2000). According to Ryan and Bernard (2000), a basic assumption schema analysts make is that schemata are cognitive simplifications that "enable culturally skilled people to fill in details of a story or event" (Ryan & Bernard 2000: 783). The initial stage of close reading can be described as the practice of using cultural schemata to interpret texts.[2]

Close reading is important in textual analysis because it helps the researcher to "get a feel" for the data and to map the data according to themes. In a first step, it entails writing down – summarizing – what a set of texts are about from the perspective of the researcher's common-sense interpretation. In a second step, the version of close reading that I describe means identifying themes. The researcher now takes a step back from – but still builds on – her/his initial, common-sense interpretation of the text. In order to identify themes, schema analysts use inductive techniques of looking for metaphors, repetitions of words, and for shifts in content (Ryan & Bernard 2000)[3]. In the present article, close reading further involves identifying central concepts <u>within</u> themes and the chains of association that define these concepts. Chains of association consist of other concepts and attributes that are closely linked with the central concept. For example, in a close reading of a set of newspaper articles belonging to the theme *Drinking during pregnancy*, I identified 'motherhood' as a central

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[2] While there are similarities between schema analysis and the tool of close reading, it is important to note that they are not identical. Schema analysis refers to an approach to qualitative analysis, while close reading refers to an analytical tool.

[3] There may be more than one theme within one item (i.e., within one text/story).

concept. In the stories about drinking during pregnancy, it is implied that mothers will do anything to avoid harm to their children, that mothers are potentially rational and that they are ultimately responsible for (their unborn) children. In other words, the position 'mother' is closely associated with the concepts of responsibility and rationality, and an important attribute of mothers is a wish to do anything to avoid harm to their children.

During the initial analytical stages of common-sense reading and identification of themes, the meaning of the text may appear unquestionable and self-evident to the researcher. But meanings that appear unquestionable may also lead the researcher to think – in a next analytical stage – that configurations of hegemonic power are involved (cf., Butler 1990; Fairclough 2003; Foucault 1979; Laclau & Mouffe 1985). In order to clarify the meaning of the text and to further analyze concepts and views that may be taken for granted by the researcher, we need techniques of distancing.

Within schema analysis, the practice of looking for what is <u>not</u> said in texts serves to distance the researcher; such omissions are information that is taken for granted (Ryan & Bernard 2000). In the present article, distancing is a tool that refers to a critical practice, where the researcher looks for diversity and questions the common sense of the common-sense understandings. One distancing technique is to identify other possible ways of giving meaning to a concept or position. For example, distancing involves finding other possible ways of conceptualizing 'motherhood', both in other texts within the total sample (comparing across texts) and "outside" the sample. We can facilitate finding other conceivable ways of understanding a concept outside the sample by studying understandings of the concept in previous historical periods and in other cultural contexts, as shown in historical and ethnographic research. For example, Foucault (1979) argued that in modern Western societies, the distinction between "normal" (heterosexuality) and "deviant" sexuality (e.g., homosexuality) has become central. As a result of the classification and categorization

practices of modern psychiatry, sexuality is understood as an identity, a personality trait. In earlier historical periods, sex referred to a set of practices rather than to an identity (Foucault 1979).

The researcher may also use "thought experiments" in which he or she imagines that he or she is a stranger to her own culture (the idea behind these thought experiments is similar to the idea behind Garfinkel's students' ethnomethodological experiments; see Garfinkel 1967).

In addition, the commutation test (Fiske 1990) may be used as a distancing technique. The purpose of this test is to identify significant differences or distinctive features that are crucial to the construction of meaning in a story. Fiske (1990: 109) defines the technique as involving "changing a unit in the system and assessing the change in meaning, if any, that has occurred" and its use is usually quite imaginative. For example, in the context of my project, using the test involved looking at the theme *Girls' drinking habits* and imagining what happened to the meaning of the stories about young girls' drinking if the central characters in the stories were instead boys, or old women, etc. Consider the following excerpt:

> Amanda, 18, and Mia, 19, can't stop drinking. Their cheeks are smooth and nice-looking, their eyes are bright and their teeth white. Amanda and Mia are as fresh as two young girls can possibly be. But they are two young girls who drink more than many full-grown men. Two young girls who think that beer and booze are the only things that make life really worth living. (The daily tabloid Expressen, 23 July 1995).

Using the commutation test here meant replacing "Amanda" and "Mia" with boys' names or replacing their ages, and so on. In this way, the researcher imaginatively replaces one category of subjects in a story with another category of subjects to make the meaning of the story clearer.[4] In order to relate this to social power in later stages of the analysis, subsequent questions concern how and why the meaning of the story changes (if the researcher considers it does). With regard to the above example, I considered that the meaning of the story would

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[4] In further applications of this technique, the researcher may use the commutation test to construct new stories with new central characters and have a reference group or a group of study participants read and interpret these.

change if we replace the girls' names with 1) boys' names, and/or 2) we change their ages. I interpreted this as implying a discourse where gender and age intersect. This discourse specifies that drinking is inappropriate for young girls but more appropriate, or at least less problematic, for young boys and men, while adult women are somewhere in-between. In other research projects, the categories the researcher chooses to replace in the story depend on the research question, but the above example demonstrates that these need not only be one-dimensional categories representing, for example, gender or age or class; it is possible to compare categories at an intersection (e.g., by replacing the age but not the names, we are able to compare young women to old women and not only girls to boys).

To sum up, we can structure the tools for analyzing meaning in the following way: 1.) Write down a common sense-based summary of what the texts/stories are about. 2.) Identify themes in the data. 3.) Map important concepts and positions within each theme. 4.) Identify chains of association that define the meaning of central concepts and positions. 5.) Apply distancing techniques to clarify meanings.

However, while identifying a set of themes is a prerequisite for studying concepts and positions within themes, after the initial stages this is not a linear project. It rather involves working back and forth among these steps; close reading and distancing are in this sense related to each other and used reciprocally. The same is true for the analysis of meaning and the analysis of positioning. In a chronology of analytical work, the analysis of meaning contributes the initial mapping of the data, but it also directs the researcher's attention towards positioning within stories. This is so because many stories involve central characters that act or are acted upon.[5] For the sake of analytical clarity, I present the tools for studying meaning and the tools for studying positioning separately, but in the analytical process, they are closely

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[5] Characters in stories need not be humans/persons, they may also be, e.g., concepts or objects, as underlined by Greimas' (1966) actantial theory.

related to one another and used reciprocally. I will return to this issue at the end of the following section.

Studying positioning in texts: subject and narrator positions

A number of theoretical approaches are available for analyzing the positions individuals hold within texts (e.g., Fairclough 1992; 2003; Foucault 1972; Laclau & Mouffe 1985). A common strategy in discourse analysis is to use the concept of 'subject position', although the term may be problematic because it is used in various ways in different theoretical frameworks (Törrönen 2001). Conceptualizing subject position only as a general, structural category (e.g., woman/man) is problematic because individuals also derive position from the specific context (e.g., as mothers; employed women; oppressed women; female addicts, etc., and conversely for men). Furthermore, positions receive meaning in different ways in different contexts. For example, positioning someone as a 'mother' might imply that this person is biologically a mother of a child; that this person occupies the social position of mother but not the biological; that this person is caring, kind and generous; that this person is unselfish or, conversely, powerful and self-sufficient, etc.

Inspired by semiotics and narrative analysis, Sulkunen and Törrönen (1997) discuss positioning from the point of view of two dimensions: the enunciative dimension and the dimension of the utterance. Their basic assumption is that positioning takes place not only within stories but that storytelling also involves a narrator (and a potential reader or receiver). The enunciative dimension refers to this narrator position; it is the aspect of discourse where speaker images are created. Speaker images, or narrator positions (for a discussion about terminology, see Sulkunen & Törrönen 1997), refer to the position or point of view from which the narrator observes and comments upon the world. Analysis of this aspect of texts focuses on, for example, the positive self-definitions of speakers/narrators. The dimension of

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the utterance, on the other hand, refers to the story itself, to what it tells about the world (Sulkunen & Törrönen 1997), and, as mentioned, to positioning of central characters within the story. The analytical process of identifying the narrator can be complicated, because the same text may include various different voices and the speaker may be more or less anonymous and difficult to detect. This is particularly true in news reports, because they are supposed to present facts objectively. I leave this issue for now, but return to it when discussing how to identify narrator positions.

Analyzing texts with the help of the two dimensions that Sulkunen and Törrönen (1997) suggest makes it possible to identify what values a certain story produces. Telling a story from a certain perspective, the narrator chooses a view of the world and this worldview includes specific values (of what is important, what is true, etc.), while at the same time excluding other worldviews and values (Sulkunen & Törrönen 1997).[6] Sulkunen and Törrönen (1997: 124) further emphasize that the enunciative dimension and the dimension of the utterance are not separate dimensions: "the meaning content of a text cannot be separated from the effects of meaning that it acquires from the structures of enunciation". The distinction therefore works as an analytic strategy that allows for a more detailed analysis of positioning.

Again following a chronology of analytical work, the process of identifying positions within texts is more clear-cut and therefore an easier place to begin. To do this, it is useful to start by looking at central themes, because, as argued above, many stories involve characters that act or are acted upon. Taking account of the critique of subject positions as general social categories, it is reasonable to look for contextual positions, i.e. positions at lower levels of

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[6] Sulkunen and Törrönen (1997) further underline that values are produced in both dimensions but in different ways. They discuss this from the point of view of modalities and further specify two types of modal evaluations, enunciative and pragmatic, referring to whether an "observer-speaker" is explicitly implied, on the one hand, or is implicit or transparent, on the other. Because their argument is built on a rather complex discussion of semiotics and narrative analysis, I will not go into this discussion here. Sulkunen and Törrönen (1997) describe, with the help of semiotic squares and examples from different types of text, how these two types of modal evaluations can be used in analyzing the relationship between the speaker/narrator and the utterance/story.

abstraction. However, these are easier to identify after first mapping more general categories, i.e., by first studying what the story says about women and men, or any other specific social categories of interest. We can then identify contextual positions (women as mothers, female addicts, factory workers, etc.) within these general categories. As with the commutation test, the practice of looking for contextual positions allows for the study of categories at the intersection (e.g., the position of women factory workers may be compared to the position of men factory workers, or to the position of women managers, etc.).

To illustrate the interpretive process of studying positioning within stories in more detail, the following example includes my interpretive notes.

An extended example: positioning within stories about drinking during pregnancy

After identifying the theme of drinking during pregnancy in my data, I looked for central characters and found, not surprisingly, that pregnant women were continuously mentioned in such stories. The next step then involved studying what the stories said and presumed about pregnant women (who drink). The following citation is an example of a typical discussion:

> Pregnant women with abuse problems form a category that would benefit from the services of healthcare personnel to insure – during a limited period of time, the pregnancy – that the pregnant woman does not harm her unborn child by abusing alcohol or narcotics. … The most important conclusion is, however, that most of the women in risk zone are socially functioning. They have work and a place to live, etc., and are not known to the social services. That's why it is, Gunilla Larsson argues, important to give all pregnant women sane and matter of fact health information about the effect of alcohol on fetuses and children. Then the pregnant woman herself may take a stand on whether she wants to change her drinking habits … Gunilla Larsson: "This information should of course be given before the pregnancy is initiated". (The daily newspaper Sydsvenska dagbladet, 12 June 1979).

In this excerpt, it is argued that some pregnant women are at risk [they drink when pregnant and this is dangerous], but most are socially functioning [presumption: pregnant women are potentially rational; they are part of society]. However, pregnant women in general may be uninformed [presumption: rational action requires knowledge about facts, information about risk]. The citation further says that if given matter-of-fact information women can take a stand [this again underlines potential for rational action].

I interpreted these stories in the following way: 1.) The stories refer to medical science, and several sociologists have discussed the status of science and the importance of scientific information about risk in contemporary society. 2.) Rational action is linked to science in these stories (by reference to facts and matter-of-fact information). 3.) The stories further presume, and sometimes explicitly argue, that no mother wants to harm her child and that mothers do anything to avoid this (not shown in the above citation). I interpreted the underlying logic in these stories as referring to responsibility, with the position of 'the responsible mother-to-be' as central. The position is defined by the linking of risk, rationality and motherhood to the decision to stop drinking: 1) a presumption about rationality: potentially rational agents need information about scientific facts in order to act rationally, is mixed with 2) a presumption about motherhood: (good) mothers do anything to avoid harm to their (unborn) children. The presumption about what rational action is, together with the presumption about what a good mother is, work together to construct the right decision: don't drink at all when pregnant. The three above-mentioned aspects of stories imply the characteristics of the 'responsible mother-to-be': the 'responsible mother' is aware and plans ahead for her pregnancy, listens to information about risk and doesn't drink at all when pregnant, because as a good mother she would do anything to avoid harm to her (unborn) child. In this way, I refined my initial identification of 'pregnant women' as central characters

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by analyzing in more detail what was said and presumed about this category, resulting in a chain of association that defined the position of 'the responsible mother'.

In the next analytical step, as a distancing technique, I considered the presumption about rationality from the point of view of cultural studies on risk (Lupton 1999). I first noted that acting rationally has positive connotations in these stories. Second, I noted that there is only one way of acting that appears rational in the stories. But an alternative way of conceptualizing rationality is to argue that what is rational to an individual depends on that individual's situation. With regard to drinking, it may be rational to have one glass of wine at a dinner with friends even when pregnant; in the context of drinking problems, it may also appear rational to the individual woman to continue drinking in moderation because of the adverse side-effects of forgoing alcohol completely, etc. Without going into detail on this in the present context, my interpretation was that because only one way of acting was defined as rational in these stories, the positioning of women as responsible mothers also implied that some women were positioned as irresponsible, or bad, mothers. From the perspective of social power, this is relevant in several ways: 1) The good mother ideal presents an understanding of motherhood that is problematic in itself because it excludes the possibility that some women experience motherhood differently (e.g., not all women necessarily agree that mothers could or should do <u>anything</u> to avoid harm to their children). This could be called a case of broad and sweeping acts of categorization. 2) Situational factors disappear in the stories. They imply that women who do not prioritize their child above anything else are bad mothers; this is problematic because it negatively evaluates these women without discussing their varying motivations and reasons. 3) The stories do not discuss men and this excludes both the possibility that a man's consumption of alcohol may affect the fetus (Daniels 1997) and the fact that some men are violent when drinking, and may physically abuse the pregnant woman and the unborn fetus. Thus, fetal risk is constructed as the woman's sole responsibility. 4) In

general, the positioning of women as mothers and the silence about men as fathers contributes to the reproduction of gender as a binary category of opposites where women alone are responsible for children. It also implies that this division of tasks ultimately stems from biology (and 'biology' is often believed to imply that something is stable and unchangeable).

Most of the stories about drinking during pregnancy report scientific facts presented from the perspective of medical experts. The journalists interview and cite researchers and/or physicians throughout the texts and generally present their answers as facts. This way of talking can be interpreted as part of a biomedical discourse on drinking, pregnancy and risk. However, there are specific aspects of the text that the researcher may study in order to identify from what perspective a story is told. In order to illustrate a few of these (see also Sulkunen & Törrönen 1997), I present a second example from my data below.

A second extended example: narrator positioning in stories about girls' drinking
In the data from 1995, I identified the theme of *Girls' drinking habits*. These stories explicitly criticize women's and above all, girls', drinking habits. They describe how girls change their drinking patterns from consuming small or moderate amounts to drinking more heavily. The stories also describe girls' behaviour as "male". They set out discussing that girls "drink as much as men", but end up discussing that drinking destroys femininity and good looks. One article explicitly says that girls want to be like boys and do what boys do. An interesting feature of these articles is that many of them mix different voices. They consist of both a facts section where there is no explicit narrator present (facts are reported in an impersonal and objective way) and sections with interviews (with both experts and "common people" such as young girls) and narratives of events (e.g., describing a girls' night out). In the interview and narrative sections, young girls sometimes appear as independent agents capable of making their own decisions, as in the citation about a girls' party trip to Cyprus below:

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To engage in temporary no-strings-attached relations isn't strange – although it isn't the purpose of the trip. "Why, sex is natural and if it happens it's because you want to. It's not about being used. In that case we use the guys as much", Linda says. … Boyfriend or not. The limits appear rather free-floating to an outsider; it is evidently a market of bodies. Legs and bellies are exposed in various (more and less becoming) variations. Minimal is max. Clichés are all around. (The daily tabloid Expressen, 26 July 1995).

In the following example, young girls again appear as central characters whose voices are heard:

Amanda, 18, and Mia, 19, can't stop drinking. Their cheeks are smooth and nice-looking, their eyes are bright and their teeth white. Amanda and Mia are as fresh as two young girls can possibly be. But they are two young girls who drink more than many full-grown men. Two young girls who think that beer and booze are the only things that make life really worth living. [One girls says to the other:] "What a nice bracelet, when did you get that?" They chatter and giggle with their heads close together, both with cigarettes in their right hands. The coffee is about to turn cold in their cups. The pastries behind the counter are more expensive than they can afford. All their money goes to booze, wine, beer and cigarettes. (The daily tabloid Expressen, 23 July 1995).

In the first citation, the girls themselves argue that they use the boys as much as the boys use them. But the girls' voices are followed by (in the first example) or mixed with (in the second example) the voice of an anonymous narrator. The first story implies that the narrator is not a participant in the social context that the utterance describes; the narrator is "an outsider" who observes and evaluates. The narrator finds it difficult to say on what grounds the girls call a man their boyfriend, as indicated in the sentence "the limits appear rather free-floating". In the second story, the anonymous narrator compares the girls to "full-grown men", implying that fresh looks, smooth cheeks, bright eyes, giggling, etc., don't go well with drinking "like full-grown men".

In analyzing these texts, the researcher may look at *shifters* (Sulkunen & Törrönen 1997, who borrowed the term from Jakobson 1971). With regard to shifters, Sulkunen and Törrönen (1997) argue that "Utterances are always connected to the speaker-now, to the here and now

of the context in which the utterance is issued. This connection is regulated by so-called

shifters […] which are of three kinds: actorial […], spatial and temporal" (Sulkunen &

Törrönen 1997: 51). As explained above, 'utterance' refers to that which is said, while

'speaker' refers to an image of the narrator, to the position from which the utterance is

observed. Shifters "mark" the connection between the narrator and the utterance. The use of

"Linda", "Amanda" and "Mia" work as actorial shifters that imply that "the utterance is about

somebody other than its enunciator" (Sulkunen & Törrönen 1997: 52). The important aspect

of this is that the stories at first glance appear to be presented from the girls' own perspective

and that it is difficult to distinguish the voice of the narrator. The shifters indicate that there is

a narrator present. Further, both citations above were from articles that mixed different types

of text; they combined interviews and narratives with facts sections. In order to identify from

what perspective the girls' actions were evaluated negatively, I compared the parts of the

articles that presented the girl's voices with the parts that interviewed experts and presented

facts. While the expert sections involved actorial shifters as well, in general the narrator didn't

provide an explicit evaluation of experts' statements; these were often left to stand for

themselves. This indicates that the narrator presents them as more true than the girls'

statements and that they are the point of view from which the events described in the girls'

own stories are observed and evaluated. For example, an excerpt from the expert-interview

section in the article about a girls' party trip to Cyprus reads: "Alcohol and a general

intoxication resulting from the heat and the different lifestyle make many lose their heads and

do things they wouldn't even dream of at home. […]" (The daily tabloid Expressen, 26 July

1995). Here, the narrator "borrows" the voice of the expert. Drawing from the narrator's way

of relating observations in the different sections of the articles and on the meaning content of

the expert arguments, I concluded that the stories about girls' drinking patterns were

presented from the perspective of medical and public health discourses.

This is relevant to social power in the following way: in general, we often discuss young people's drinking from a problems perspective and we seldom hear the subjects' own interpretations of what drinking means to them (see Bogren 2006). The newspaper stories present some of the young girls' own understandings of drinking (e.g., they talk about drinking as empowering). However, the narrator rejects their argument – they have misunderstood what gender equality and empowerment mean. In this way, the narrator participates in broad and sweeping acts of categorization by imposing certain expert understandings on the young girls' own stories (implying that <u>all</u> girls who "drink like men" do this because of a "faulty" understanding of gender equality).

As I imply throughout this discussion, the tools for studying positioning are related to the tools for studying meaning. The following analytical steps in studying positioning summarize how: 1.) Identify positioning within stories, at the level of utterance, by looking for contextual positions, i.e. positions at lower levels of abstraction. Start at higher levels of abstraction by using the central characters identified in step 3 in the analysis of meaning, then look for observations and presumptions about these characters. 2.) Use chains of association defining central concepts and create/combine them with chains of association defining central characters (back and forth between step 4 in the analysis of meaning, and step 2 in the analysis of positioning). 3.) Apply distancing techniques to clarify meanings and presumptions about positions. 4.) Identify narrator positions by looking for mixed voices, facts sections, shifters and positive/negative evaluation (positive/negative words, concepts).

Further, the analytical process doesn't end with the analysis of narrator positions. As the initial step in studying meaning, I argued that it was useful to write a summary of what the texts/stories are about, based on a common-sense reading. This summary is the point of departure for discussing the presuppositions of a specific discourse. Using techniques of distancing, the researcher can ask whether there are competing <u>discourses</u> that relate to the

world from other points of view, built on other presuppositions, in which central characters have different positions. For this purpose, the researcher can also use the competing ways of defining central concepts and positions that we identified in the early analytical steps of distancing; are these competing meanings perhaps part of another, competing discourse or are there several competing discourses that involve some of these concepts? In this way, we can use the interpretive notes that result from studying meaning in the initial stages of analysis throughout the analytical process.

Discussion

In conclusion, the combination of analytical tools I suggest here captures partly overlapping dimensions of texts that are equally important in the analysis of social power. Like looking at something from two slightly different points of view, the two sets of tools approach the <u>analysis</u> of texts from two slightly different perspectives but without presupposing that positioning and meaning are two separate textual dimensions.

The most important advantage of combining tools for studying meaning with tools for studying positioning is that they allow for more detailed analysis. With these tools, the researcher is able to map the meaning of central themes in her data, analyze these with regard to positioning within themes/stories, and analyze the stories with regard to narrator positioning. Analyzing two levels of positioning captures more of the complexity of social power in texts because it acknowledges that texts that appear to be presented from the perspective of a neglected group may at the same time negatively evaluate the actions of this group (as with the young girls who "drink like men"). And analyzing the meaning of themes, central concepts, and positions in relative detail acknowledges that what appears to be the "same" position (e.g., the good mother) may imply slightly different meanings in different contexts.

As argued in the introduction, the analytical tools presented in this paper were assembled for the purpose of studying gender as one of many important dimensions of social power. However, I have tried to point to their usefulness in analyzing other dimensions of social power and to their usefulness in intersectional analysis. With regard to intersectionality, the tools focus on analyzing how texts produce categories, rather than on the experiences of a specific social group "at a neglected point of intersection" (McCall 2005: 1780). Still, the analysis of how categories are produced in texts can be used as a basis for the type of critique that McCall (2005) refers to when she talks about an approach to complexity that seeks to complicate group boundaries and use categories in more critical ways. The tools for analyzing meaning and subject and narrator positioning help the researcher identify how categories are produced (by identifying chains of association that define subject positions in the specific context) and how the actions of specific categories of people are evaluated (by analyzing narrator positions). If the researcher finds that the narrator draws categories in broad terms and does not take situational factors into account, as in the case of the position of the responsible mother and the young girls who drink in the data from my project, this may form a basis for criticizing this method of categorization. Further, if the researcher finds that the narrator repeatedly evaluates the actions of a specific category of people negatively, as in the case of the young girls who drink, this may be a basis for criticizing the narrator's perspective.

Perspectives and discourses can be criticized for contributing to the perpetuation of power relationships "outside" texts. The above-mentioned examples from my project reproduce a discourse on gender as a binary category of opposites. This discourse has social consequences relevant both to gender images in society in general and to drinking practices, prevention and treatment. The discourse specifies that women, not men, are responsible for (unborn) children, that young girls, but not young men, have to be careful of their drinking because it makes

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them appear "like men" and may destroy their fresh looks, and that young girls, but not young men, are "deceived" by the ideal of gender equality. In talking about how women's drinking affects unborn children, the discourse also implies that the division of tasks – especially with regard to being responsible for (unborn) children – ultimately derives from biology (and therefore appears stable and unchangeable). This discursive image of gender potentially affects both women's and men's beliefs about what it means to be a woman and a man, respectively, and what their "natural" responsibilities should be. It does this by making specific ways of acting appear possible and others impossible or difficult. For example, that stories associate certain tasks with one gender and not the other narrows down the much more complex array of possible ways to divide tasks between people. Describing girls who drink as "trying to be male" narrows down the possible ways of interpreting people's actions. Actions become a sign of your status as <u>either</u> male <u>or</u> female and if your actions are not in accord with your biological body – e.g., if a person in a female body acts in "masculine" ways – this poses a problem (Butler 1990).

With regard to drinking practices, this discourse may affect both how parents relate to their daughters (and other young women) and how prevention and treatment work relates to girls. That this discourse proposes that young girls' drinking is the result of their "faulty" understanding of gender equality may lead parents as well as prevention and treatment work in the direction of educating young girls about gender equality and about their position and responsibilities as future mothers. However, in this way, problematic gender images are again reproduced and girls who do not understand drinking as related to gender equality disappear from the focus of prevention and treatment. Furthermore, this discourse also contributes to the reproduction of problematic images of men, and these, in turn, potentially lead parents and prevention and treatment work to forget that children and (future) families might be of concern to boys as well.

As a final point, I want to underline that the question of the social consequences of texts cannot be fully solved by studying texts only. The same is true for intersectional analysis; that is, studying categorization in texts is only one aspect of the analysis of intersectionality and social power. Newspaper texts are perhaps especially well suited for studying the evaluation of social categories, but they tell less about the lived experience of neglected social groups. Still, analyzing texts may direct the researcher's attention towards specific social groups at neglected points of intersection (McCall 2005); for example, how do young girls themselves relate to the classification of themselves as "girls who drink like men"? As I argued in the introduction, people are not merely passive recipients of texts or discourses; they read and interpret texts, make sense of texts. In order to study the lived experience of social groups at neglected points of intersection and to find out how different groups of people interpret texts, we need to use other research methods than textual analysis.

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