"BUT MOM, CROP-TOPS *ARE* CUTE!" SOCIAL KNOWLEDGE, SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND IDEOLOGY CRITIQUE

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A study of the science of man is inseparable from an examination of the options between which men must choose. This means that we can speak here not only of error, but of illusion. We speak of 'illusion' when we are dealing with something of greater substance than error, [it is] error which in a sense builds a counterfeit reality of its own . . . [Such illusions] are more than errors in this sense: they are sustained by certain practices of which they are constitutive.

(Taylor 1985/1971, 54)

Certainly a good deal of men's tyranny over women can be observed through data, experiments, and research . . . Many things can be known in this way . . . . [But it does not] show that it is unnecessary or changeable, except speculatively, because what is not there is not considered real. Women's situation cannot be truly known for what it is, in the feminist sense, without knowing that it can be other than it is. By operating as legitimating ideology, the scientific standard for verifying reality can reinforce a growing indignation, but it cannot create feminism that was not already there. Knowing objective facts does not do what consciousness does.

(MacKinnon 1989, 100-101)

I. Introduction[1]

In the social realm, knowledge, or what purports to be knowledge, is entangled with the reality it represents. Social institutions are constituted, at least in part, by sets of shared beliefs and conventions; even false beliefs about social phenomena can cause changes in the social world that result in the belief's becoming true (Langton 2007). As a result, it is sometimes suggested that an epistemology of the social realm must not simply be

concerned with whether a belief is justified and true. When social knowledge goes wrong, it may be because it has constituted a reality—and perhaps accurately represents that reality—that nevertheless falls short in some way. Following Taylor (see epigraph), the suggestion might be that the social reality created by the belief is an illusion. But if it is, in what sense is it an illusion? Is it an illusion about what's possible? About what's good? And is an evaluation of the product of knowledge a legitimate part of social epistemology?

Catharine MacKinnon's work repeatedly and forcefully raises the question how an epistemology of the social should proceed in oppressive social contexts. On MacKinnon's view (1989, see also epigraph),

> Consciousness raising, by contrast [to scientific inquiry] inquires into an intrinsically social situation, in the mixture of thought and materiality which comprises gender in its broadest sense. (MacKinnon 1989, 83)

She continues, "The process is transformative as well as perceptive, since thought and thing are inextricably and reciprocally constitutive of women's oppression..." (MacKinnon 1989, 84) Given the interdependence of social thought and reality, a change of meaning can transform the social world.[2] This calls, however, for a new branch of epistemology:

> This epistemology does not at all deny that a relation exists between thought and some reality other than thought, or between human activity (mental or otherwise) and the products of that activity. Rather, it redefines the epistemological issue from being a scientific one, the relation between knowledge and objective reality, to a problem of the relation of consciousness to social being. (MacKinnon 1989, 99)

Setting aside the challenge of interpreting her positive view, she is raising an epistemological problem about what "should" be thought in those domains where what is thought (at least partly) both determines and is determined by its object. This problem is especially pressing when this occurs at a site of injustice. My goal in this essay is to provide some resources for developing a response.

II. Are Crop-Tops Cute?

To make this more concrete, consider the role of fashion in schools. The belief that certain girls are wearing crop-tops that expose their midriff partly constitutes the fact that it is fashionable to wear such tops and causes many other girls to do the same. Plausibly, in such situations it becomes "common knowledge" that, say, seventh grade girls are wearing crop-tops this spring.[3] But, one might argue, it would be better if seventh grade (roughly age 12) girls

were wearing ordinary—midriff covering—tops instead (because the crop-tops sexualize the girls who wear them, further marginalize the chubby girls, etc.). So parents who are uncomfortable with the crop-top fashion, and yet find themselves faced with a daughter who is eager to join the crowd, might suggest to her that, e.g., she shouldn't care about being fashionable, that she shouldn't let what the other girls are doing determine her choices, that she is beautiful in her track suit.

However, even if the daughter is individually able to retain her self-respect without bowing to the fashion trend, it may still be true that she will be marginalized if she doesn't conform and that the fashionable girls are sexualized (Warner 2007). Bucking conventions may be a partial solution that works for some individuals. But the problem is not individual. The situation would be better if "seventh grade girls are wearing crop-tops this spring" wasn't part of a set of beliefs that constitute common knowledge in the school (or the broader society).

With this in mind, consider the following familiar dialogue:

> *Daughter:* "Can I have some money to buy a crop-top like Ashley's to wear to school?"
> *Parents:* "You can have a new top, but not a crop-top. Crop-tops are too revealing."
> *Daughter:* "But Mom[Dad], you're just wrong. Everyone knows that crop-tops are cute; and I don't want to be a dork."
> *Parents:* "I'm sorry, sweetie, crop-tops *are not* cute, and you *won't* be a dork if you wear your track suit."

Under the circumstances it seems that there is something right about Daughter's reply to Parents, and their reply is not enough. And yet, aren't the parents right?

One might initially assume that in this conversation there is a disagreement over the truth-value of the following claims:

(1) Seventh grade girls who wear crop-tops to school are cute.
(2) Seventh grade girls who wear track suits to school are dorks.

One way to unpack the truth-value reading of the disagreement is to suggest that "cute" and "dork" are evaluative predicates and those who believe (1) and (2) are wrong about the objective (social/aesthetic/sartorial) value of crop-tops and track suits. But this is implausible. The patterns of social interaction at the school are what determine the extensions of 'cute' and 'dork': if a girl walks like a dork, sounds like a dork, dresses like a dork, she is a dork.

Where *objectivist readings* of statements such as (1) seem misguided, the alternative is often taken to be a *subjectivist reading* which renders the

disagreement a matter of taste. On this reading the parents and daughter simply have different sartorial tastes, just as they might have different tastes in food or humor. In effect, the daughter is claiming that crop-tops are cute *to her* (or to her classmates), and the parents are claiming that they are not cute *to them* (or to their peers). But this fails to capture the sense in which the parents are disagreeing with the daughter and are in a position to offer a critique of the fashion trends. On a broader scale, although social norms and such are at least partly constituted by the attitudes of the social group they govern, an acceptable approach must make room for meaningful critique across groups.

Yet another reading of the disagreement would be to see the parent as rejecting, and urging the daughter to reject, the "cute/dork" dichotomy: these ways of classifying yourself and others based on a willingness to wear sexy clothing are misguided and should be avoided. Parents undertake to disrupt such classifications, as do teachers and school administrators who institute dress codes and such. Let's call this the *framework reading*.[4] On the framework reading (1) is true and one may be justified in believing it. But at the same time it captures and reinforces (and uttered by the right person at the right moment, might even create) a misguided distinction.

Without taking a stand yet on precisely what's at issue between parents and daughter, there are, nonetheless, the makings of a puzzle. If the social reality is organized around the cute/dork dichotomy, then there are cute girls and dorky girls, and it would be a mistake not to recognize this. This is important social knowledge. But at the same time it is tempting to say that the cute/dork dichotomy is an illusion. It is socially and morally problematic and because it is reified through a pattern of belief and expectation, it could be undermined by a refusing to have beliefs in its terms. More generally, in cases such as this we seem to be able to generate a contradiction: it is true that *p* so you should believe *p*; but believing *p* makes it true, and it would be better if *p* weren't true; so you shouldn't believe *p*.

III. "Should Believe"

So it appears that the daughter should believe that, say, seventh grade girls who wear track suits to school are dorks, and yet, if her parent is right, she should also not believe it. A first stab at avoiding the puzzle would be to suggest that there are two senses of 'should' involved in this line of thought. The girl should believe what is true; this is an *epistemic* 'should'. Yet for moral/political reasons, she should also not believe the statements in question If she believes that track-suited girls are dorks, this will contribute to the patterns of beliefs and expectations that constitute the social fact that such girls are dorks, which would be bad. This second 'should,' it might be

argued, is a *pragmatic* or *moral* 'should'. Thus, there is an equivocation in the argument and the puzzle dissolves.

Although there seems to be something right about this response, it isn't sufficient. First, it is controversial to suggest that pragmatic or moral norms apply to believing, for it isn't clear that believing is, in the relevant sense, a matter of choice (Williams 1973). The daughter experiences her friends as cute in crop-tops and the track suited others as dorky, and this may not be something she can change at will. For example, if the parent threatens, "If you continue to believe that crop-tops are suitable for seventh grade girls to wear to school, I'll cut your allowance in half," it seems there is little the daughter can do other than look for reasons that will change her mind (or lie about what she believes).

Second, the "framework" reading of the disagreement—the reading on which the cute/dork dichotomy is misguided—suggests that the tweenage categories are ill-conceived. A reason for rejecting (1) and (2) seems to involve a charge of inaccuracy or misrepresentation. Although there is something true about the claim that girls who wear track suits to school are dorks, there is also something false about it. For example, contrast the case with one in which the (non-athletic) daughter replies to her parents, "But Mom/Dad, the girls who wear track suits to school are all on the track team." The parent might try to resist the identification of athletes with what they wear. But it would be odd to reject the framework that distinguishes those on the track team, from those who aren't, in the same way that they rejected the cute/dorky framework: "But sweetie, you *won't be* on the track team if you wear a track suit." (Cf. "But sweetie, you *won't be* a dork if you wear a track suit.") Although the *cute/dorky* distinction and the *track team/not-track team* distinction both capture social categories, there is something illusory about the former in contrast to the latter.

So although some considerations that count against accepting (1) and (2) may not be epistemic, it is worth considering further the idea that there is some epistemic failing in the daughter's commitment to (1) and (2). In other words, there seems to be a sense in which the daughter both should and should not, *epistemically speaking,* believe that seventh grade girls who wear track suits are dorks. (Henceforth, I'll focus on (1) since there seems to be no significant difference between (1) and (2) for our purposes.)

IV. Social Reality

The example of the seventh grade girl and her parents is a small instance of what's involved in navigating and negotiating the social world. The girl and her parents are members of different social groups (age-wise), have different experiences, beliefs, and frameworks for understanding what actions and events mean. Both seem to have important social knowledge, but they are also deeply at odds. In the background, I believe, are important issues

concerning ideology and social structure. So in the next several sub-sections I will explore some aspects of the interdependence of thought and reality in the social world so we can better understand how thought can fail us without being false. My goal is not to define "the social" or to give a full-blown theory of social structure, but to illuminate the example we've been considering, and others like it, by exploring the idea that there are multiple social worlds or milieus. I will then return to the puzzle set out in the first two sections.

a. Ideology

In order to develop an account of social knowledge, it will be useful to think about the relationship between agents, their ideas, and social structures generally: what are social structures, and how do agents create, maintain, and change them? Let's begin with the concept of ideology.

There is much disagreement over the nature of ideology, yet in the most basic sense ideologies are representations of social life that serve in some way to undergird social practices.[5] We are not simply cogs in structures and practices of subordination, we enact them. And something about how we represent the world is both a *constitutive part* of that enactment and *keeps it going*.[6]

> ...ideology and discourse refer to pretty much the same aspect of social life – the idea that human individuals participate in forms of understanding, comprehension or consciousness of the relations and activities in which they are involved...This consciousness is borne through language and other systems of signs, it is transmitted between people and institutions and, perhaps most important of all, it *makes a difference*; that is, the way in which people comprehend and make sense of the social world has consequences for the direction and character of their action and inaction. Both 'discourse' and 'ideology' refer to these aspects of social life. (Purvis and Hunt 1993, 474; see also McCarthy 1990, 440)

Ideology in this broad, sometimes referred to as the *descriptive,* sense, is pervasive and unavoidable. The term 'ideology' is also sometimes used in a narrower and *pejorative sense*, however, to refer to representations of the relevant sort that are somehow misguided, e.g., by being contrary to the real interests of an agent or group of agents.[7] For current purposes, we can think of ideology as an element in a social system that contributes to its survival and yet that is susceptible to change through some form of cognitive critique.

The belief that "seventh grade girls who wear crop-tops are cute" is a good candidate for a piece of ideology. It is a constitutive part of the fashion norms of seventh grade girls in the school: the belief that girls are wearing such outfits functions to set up a pattern of understandings and expectations that reinforces the pattern of behavior. Moreover, it is plausibly ideology in the pejorative sense because the behavior it sustains subordinates girls. For example, empirical research shows that under conditions of stereotype threat,

e.g., in contexts where there is a background assumption that girls are worse at math than boys, anything that primes for gender identity—and highly gender coded clothing has been found to be one such thing—causes girls to do worse on math tests (Frederickson et al. 1998; Spencer et al. 1999; Cadinu et al. 2005). Yet we might hope that such beliefs are susceptible to cognitive critique, perhaps even parental challenges of the sort we've considered.

Given the discussion in the previous sections, however, we should be attentive to the possibility that an ideology is not just a set of beliefs, and ideology critique is not just a matter of showing that the beliefs in question are false or unwarranted. The framework reading of the disagreement over crop-tops suggested, for example, that *the dichotomy* of cute/dorky itself was ideological; and the responses that have been conditioned to experience exposed midriffs as cute may be something less than full belief.

Further considerations suggesting that ideology is not simply a matter of belief include:

- In some cases, belief seems too cognitive, or too "intellectual."

  > Ideology is concerned with the realm of the lived, or the experienced, rather than of 'thinking' . . . . It is precisely the 'spontaneous' quality of common sense, its transparency, its 'naturalness', its refusal to examine the premises on which it is grounded, its resistance to correction, its quality of being instantly recognizable which makes common sense, at one and the same time, 'lived', 'spontaneous', and unconscious. We live in common sense—we do not think it. (Purvis and Hunt 1993, 479)

- Ideology can take the form of practical knowledge, knowledge how to do certain things. Habitual gestures and body language that are ubiquitous in human interaction are ideological.
- Ideologies seem to work at the level of "slogans" that can be interpreted differently over time and by different constituencies, e.g., American is the land of the free and home of the brave. (Fields 1982, 155-9) Beliefs have a determinate content that is not compatible with this.
- Beliefs may be too individualistic. Social practices are ideological, but many people who live in a culture and follow its practices don't have the beliefs that are ordinarily identified as the ideology undergirding the practices.

b. Social structure

Ideology plays a role in constituting and reinforcing social structures. But what *is* a social structure? There is considerable interdisciplinary work on this topic by social historians, social psychologists, and sociologists interested in subordination and critical resistance. As I am using the term here, 'social

structure' is a general category of social phenomena, including, e.g., social institutions, social practices and conventions, social roles, social hierarchies, social locations or geographies and the like. Some social structures will be formal and so the schematic element will be precise and explicit (the structure of faculty governance at any university); some will involve intricate but not fully explicit coordination (informal traffic norms); others will be informal and vague and not well coordinated (the structure of holiday gift-giving).[8]

William Sewell (a social historian), drawing on Anthony Giddens, argues for an account that takes structures to be "both the medium and the outcome of the practices which constitute social systems." (Sewell 1992, 4, quoting Giddens 1981, 27; see also Giddens 1979). Sewell continues: "Structures shape people's practices, but it is also people's practices that constitute (and reproduce) structures. In this view of things, human agency and structure, far from being *opposed*, in fact *presuppose* each other." (Sewell 1992, 4).

More specifically, Giddens' is known for identifying structures as "rules and resources." On Sewell's account, however, the combination becomes "schemas and resources" in order to avoid the assumption that the cognitive element must always take the form of a rule (Sewell 1992, 8). Sewell takes schemas to include:

> . . . all the variety of cultural schemas that anthropologists have uncovered in their research: not only the array of binary oppositions that make up a given society's fundamental tools of thought, but also the various conventions, recipes, scenarios, principles of action, and habits of speech and gesture built up with these fundamental tools." (Sewell 1992, 7-8).

It is crucial to Sewell that these schemas are not private and personal patterns of thought, but are intersubjective and transposable in response to new circumstances.

Responding to Sewell, Judith Howard (a social psychologist) points out that Sewell's (1992) use of the term *schema* differs from its use in social psychology. Whereas social psychologists tend to think of schemas as concerned with the organization of an individual's thought, Sewell develops the notion in a way that highlights its cultural deployment. She suggests:

> A synthesis of these conceptions of schemas might prove remarkably useful: the stricter social cognitive models provide a sound basis for predicting how and when intra-individual schemas change, whereas the more recent sociological conceptions say more about how group interactions shape the formation and evolution of cultural schemas. (Howard 1994, 218)

If we take Howard's idea seriously, we should explore the interdependence between individual schemas and their cultural counterparts. "Schemas, for example, are both mental and social; they both derive from and constitute cultural, semiotic, and symbolic systems." (Howard 1994, 218).

What are we to make of this? Let's take schemas to be intersubjective patterns of perception, thought and behavior. They are embodied in individuals as a shared cluster of open-ended dispositions to see things a certain way or to respond habitually in particular circumstances. Schemas encode knowledge and also provide scripts for interaction with each other and our environment. They also exist at different depths. Deep schemas are pervasive and relatively unconscious. Surface schemas are more narrow and are easier to identify and change; but their change may leave the deeper schema intact. For example, rules concerning gender differences in clothing have changed, yet the more formal the event, the more strict the gender codes. Does this suggest that in contexts where power, authority, and prestige are managed, the deep schema of women as submissive or hobbled property of men still functions?[9]

On this view, schemas are one component of social structures, *resources* are the other. Social structures cannot be identified simply as schemas because social structures have material existence and a reality that "pushes back" when we come to it with the wrong or an incomplete schema. For example, the schema of two sex categories is manifested in the design and labeling of toilet facilities. If we're analyzing social structures, then in addition to the mental content or disposition, there must be an actualization of it in the world, e.g., an enactment of it, that involves something material. Resources provide the materiality of social structures. On the Giddens/Sewell account, resources are anything that "can be used to enhance or maintain power." (Sewell 1992, 9) This includes human resources such as "physical strength, dexterity, knowledge," (Sewell 1992, 9) in addition to materials—animate and inanimate—in the usual sense.

How do schemas and resources together constitute social structures? Sewell suggests a causal interdependence. (Sewell 1992, 13) He elaborates:

> A factory is not an inert pile of bricks, wood, and metal. It incorporates or actualizes schemas.... The factory gate, the punching-in station, the design of the assembly line: all of these features of the factory teach and validate the rules of the capitalist labor contract... In short, if resources are instantiations or embodiments of schemas, they therefore inculcate and justify the schemas as well... Sets of schemas and resources may properly be said to constitute *structures* only when they mutually imply and sustain each other over time. (Sewell 1992, 13)

So on Sewell's view a social structure exists when there is a causal, and mutually sustaining, interdependence between a shared or collective schema and an organization of resources. Sewell's claim that the two elements of structure "imply and sustain each other" suggests a constitutive relationship as well: the pile of bricks, wood, and metal *is* a punching-in station because schemas that direct employers to pay employees by the hour and employees to

keep track of their hours are enacted with this tool. The schema for keeping track of hours *is* a punching-in schema because there is a punch-clock that the employer will use as a basis for calculating wages. Without the invention of the punch-clock, there could be no punching-in schema. There is a causal relationship, but not just a causal relationship. What else is it?

Consider a familiar example: a statue and the bronze of which it is composed. The bronze constitutes the statue, e.g., the figure of Joan of Arc on horseback in New York City's Riverside Park. The bronze is the statue not only by virtue of its shape, but also by virtue of having a certain history, function, interpretation, etc. Think of the bronze as resource; think of the dispositions that give rise to the statue's history, function, interpretation (roughly) as schema. The role of schema may be still more evident in the constitution of it as a memorial. The Joan of Arc statue commemorates "the 500[10] anniversary of Joan of Arc's birth." The statue consists of the shaped bronze, and the statue in turn constitutes the memorial, understood as a further schema-structured resource: [[[bronze, shape], statue], memorial]. Thus it appears that the schema/resource distinction can be applied in ways analogous to the matter/form distinction.

Consider an example of a social event rather than a social object: the performance of a Bach minuet on the piano. The performance is an event that involves both the piano, the sheet music, fingers and such (as resources), and also a set of dispositions to respond to the sheet music by playing the piano keys in a certain way, plus the various ritualized gestures that make it a performance rather than a rehearsal (as schema). Considered in this light, most actions involve not only an agent with an intention and a bodily movement, but a set of dispositions to interact with things to realize the intention; think of cycling, cooking, typing. These dispositions conform to publicly accessible and socially meaningful patterns and are molded by both the social and physical context. Because often such dispositions give rise to objects that trigger those very dispositions, they can be extremely resistant to change (think of the challenge of replacing the qwerty keyboard).

This sort of schematic materiality of our social worlds is ubiquitous: towns, city halls, churches, universities, philosophy departments, gyms, play-grounds, homes, are schematically structured and practice-imbued material things (cf. a "ghost town" or "a house but not a home" whose schemas are lost or attenuated). The social world includes artifacts which are what they are because of what is to be done with them; it also includes schemas for action that are what they are because they direct our interaction with some part of the world. Thus at least some parts of the social/cognitive world and material world are co-constitutive.

If a practice is the structured product of schema (a set of dispositions to perceive and respond in certain ways) and resources (a set of tools and material goods), it is not "subjective" in any of the ordinary uses of that term. Social structures are not just in our heads (just as the statue is not just

in our heads); social structures are public (just as the bronze only constitutes a memorial by virtue of the collective interpretation and pattern of action in response to it); although social structures are not simply material things, they are constituted by material things. They are "constructed" by us in the ordinary way that artifacts are created by us. One can believe in them without accepting the idea, sometimes endorsed by "social constructionists" that our thought constructs, in a less ordinary way, what there is in the world (Haslanger 2003).

This rough account of social structures helps to define idea of a social *milieu*. As we saw above, the schemas that constitute social structures are intersubjective or cultural patterns, scripts and the like, that are internalized by individuals to form the basis of our responses to socially meaningful objects, actions, and events. In many cases, perhaps even most, the dominant cultural schema will also be the one that individuals in that context have made "their own". However, it is not always that simple. Individuals bear complex relations to the dominant schemas of their cultural context; they may be ignorant of or insensitive to a schema, may reject a schema, or may modify a schema for their own purposes. One may be deliberately out of sync with one's milieu, or just "out of it". It is also the case that different schemas vie for dominance in public space. For example, what happens when a group of people approach a closed door they want to go through? Some will employ a "gallant gentleman" schema and will hold the door for the ladies; others will employ a "whoever gets there first holds the door" schema; still others will employ a "first-come, first enters, hold your own door" schema. Which schema one brings to the doorway may be a matter of socialization and/or choice.

For the purposes of this paper it will be useful to define an individual's (general) social milieu in terms of the social structures within which he or she operates, whether or not the public schemas in question have been internalized. Although we can choose some of the structures within which we live, it is not always a matter of choice, e.g., I am governed by the laws of the United States whether I choose to be or not. Of course, individuals do not live within only one milieu; and milieus overlap. One's workplace, place of worship, civic space, and home are structured spaces; each of these structures are inflected by race, gender, class, nationality, age, and sexuality to name a few relevant factors. So it will be important to specify an individual's milieu at a time and place and possibly in relation to specified others. In this essay I will not be able to give precise conditions that specify what milieu is operative for an individual in a given context; we'll just have to rely on clear-enough cases for now.

Given the notion of a milieu, we can return to a claim introduced at the beginning of the paper about which Parents and Daughter disagreed:

(1) Seventh grade girls who wear crop-tops to school are cute.

Plausibly, cuteness and dorkiness are features that must be judged from social milieus because they are partly constituted by those milieus. In the seventh grade, the schemas that govern the responses to clothes constitute a structure that (1) accurately describes. Daughter, has internalized those schemas, and is correct in asserting (1); in Parents' milieu, however, (1) is incorrect. It is tempting to say, then, that both are saying something true because (1) is true relative to one milieu and not the other. But how should we make sense of this "milieu relativism"? In the following section I will suggest a promising model and then raise some questions to be addressed in order to fulfill the promise.

V. Social Truths

There is something tempting about the idea that we live in different social worlds (or milieus); that what's true in one social world is obscure from another; that some social worlds are better for its inhabitants than others; and that some social worlds are based on illusion and distortions. How might we make sense of this?

a. Relative truth

Recent work in epistemology and philosophy of language has explored versions of relativism in order to give accounts of a wide variety of phenomena, including "faultless disagreement," (Kölbel 2003; MacFarlane 2006) statements of personal taste (Lasersohn 2005), the context sensitivity of knowledge attributions (MacFarlane 2004). The basic strategy is to explore how the truth of a statement may be sensitive to context. Consider a sentence such as:

(3) This oatmeal is lumpy.

Because there is an indexical term 'this' in (3), context—in particular, the *context of use*—must be consulted in order to determine what proposition, if any, is being expressed. In a particular context, (3) can be used to express a proposition concerning (a particular bowl of) Instant Quaker Oats, and in another context to express a proposition concerning (a particular bowl of) Scottish porridge. It is important to note, however, that whether the proposition expressed is true or not depends further on, e.g., the world or perhaps the world/time pair under consideration. So even if we settle what particular bowl of oatmeal is in question, it still might be true in one world (or at one world/time) that the bowl of Quaker Oats in question is lumpy and in another world (or at another world/time) not. For example, if (3) is

uttered in the actual world one morning referring to a particular bowl of oatmeal, it expresses a proposition that, at least on some accounts, is true at worlds (or world/times) where that oatmeal is lumpy and false where not.

So the context of use can play two roles in determining the truth-value of a statement such as (3):

(i) it fixes the semantic value of any indexical in the utterance, and yields the propositional content, and

(ii) it fixes the circumstances relative to which we should evaluate the proposition's truth or falsity.

Drawing on John MacFarlane's account of relative truth, we can then contrast *indexicality,* where context is necessary to complete the proposition expressed, and *context sensitivity*, where context is necessary to determine the truth value of the proposition by determining the circumstances of evaluation (MacFarlane 2005, 327).

MacFarlane argues that in addition to contributions from the context of use, the context of assessment is also relevant to determining the propositional content and truth value of a statement:

> We perform speech acts, but we also assess them; so just as we can talk of the context in which a sentence is being used, we can talk of a context (there will be indefinitely many) in which a use of it is being assessed. (MacFarlane 2005, 325)

To see why *context of assessment* is sometimes necessary to capture meaning, consider the statement:

(4) This oatmeal is yummy.

Suppose Fred asserts (4), and suppose further that what proposition is expressed and what circumstances of evaluation are relevant to its truth-value is determined by the context of use (no context of assessment is involved). Suppose, though, that Ginger's intervenes:

(5) Sorry, Fred, you're wrong... This oatmeal is not yummy.

If 'yummy' in (4) and (5) is understood indexically, then the proposition Fred utters is:

(4$_\text{I}$) This oatmeal *is-yummy-to-Fred.*

And in denying his claim Ginger is saying[11]:

(5$_\text{I}$) It is not the case that this oatmeal *is-yummy-to-Ginger.*

On this account, Ginger is denying a different proposition than the one Fred expressed and she isn't disagreeing with him. The indexical interpretation makes no sense of her claim "You're wrong!"

An advantage of context-sensitivity over indexicality is that the proposition expressed by (5) is the denial of the proposition expressed by (4); context plays a role not in changing the content of the proposition but in determining different circumstances of evaluation. Continue to suppose, however, that only the *context of use* is available to evaluate the disagreement between Fred and Ginger. We then have:

(4$_S$) *This oatmeal is yummy*, relative to C_U.
(5$_S$) Sorry, Fred, you're wrong... It is not the case that *this oatmeal is yummy*, relative to C_U.

The proposition expressed by 'this oatmeal is yummy' in (4$_S$) is denied by (5$_S$), yet it is not yet clear how both Fred and Ginger can be saying something correct if the context's contribution to truth-value is the same in both cases. For example, if C_U in (4$_S$) relativizes Fred's claim to his taste standards, then because Ginger denies (4$_S$) with (5$_S$), plausibly (5$_S$) is relativized to the same standards and would be false. So Ginger's utterance can get no purchase on Fred's claim. What we need is that there is something about Ginger's context of assessment that differs from Fred's context and allows (5$_S$) to be true relative to her context but not Fred's.

MacFarlane argues that we should allow both the context of use and the context of assessment to play a role in determining circumstances of evaluation. (MacFarlane 2005, 327) Then because Ginger's context of assessment is different from the context of Fred's use *and* assessment, the proposition (4) is true relative to Fred's context of assessment and false relative to Ginger's.

(4$_A$) *This oatmeal is yummy* relative to C_{UF} and C_{AF}.
(5$_A$) Sorry, Fred, you're wrong... It is not the case that *this oatmeal is yummy* relative to C_{UF} and C_{AG}.

In (4$_A$) and (5$_A$), Fred's context of use determines the semantic value of the indexical 'this' and the contexts of assessment determine the different standards of yumminess. Fred and Ginger disagree because their statements cannot both be true relative to a common context of assessment (MacFarlane 2006). This gives us "faultless disagreement": both are, in a sense, right, even though they, in a sense, contradict each other.

One might wonder, however, why parties to such a debate bother to disagree if truth is context-sensitive and both sides can be right. MacFarlane suggests:

> Perhaps the point is to bring about agreement by leading our interlocutors into relevantly different contexts of assessment. If you say, 'skiing is fun' and I contradict you, it is not because I think the proposition you asserted is false as

assessed by you in your current situation, with the affective attitudes you now
have, but because I hope to change those attitudes. Perhaps the point of using
controversy-inducing assessment-sensitive vocabulary is to foster *coordination* of
contexts. (MacFarlane 2006, 22)

b. Truth relative to milieu, i.e., "social truth" relativism

Can we use the model just sketched to make sense of the disagreement
between Daughter and Parents? Recall:

(1) Seventh grade girls who wear crop-tops to school are cute.

The suggestion would be that (1) is true relative to Daughter's social milieu
and false relative to Parents'. So:

(1_{AD}) *Seventh grade girls who wear crop-tops to school are cute* relative
to C_{UD} and C_{AD}.

(1_{AP}) It is not the case that *Seventh grade girls who wear crop-tops to
school are cute* relative to C_{UD} and C_{AP}.

The context of assessment determines the milieu in question by reference
to the assessor's social milieu, i.e., the complex of schemas and resources
operative for him or her in that context. (Recall that this is not a subjective
matter, so in this respect there is an important difference between relativizing
truth to an individual's taste, and to an individual's milieu.) How, though,
does the context of assessment determine milieu? We saw above that it is a
tricky question which structures are operative for an individual in a context
and more needs to be said to make this precise.[12] I am assuming here, however,
that Parents are governed by the practices and norms of a parental social role
that discourages the sexualization of twelve year old girls. (This is not to say,
however, that the parental role or the message is always clear.)

In initially considering the crop-top conversation, we considered three
different strategies for analyzing the conflict: the objectivist reading, the
subjectivist reading, and the framework reading. The relativist reading cap-
tures some elements of each. It has objectivist elements, for the statements in
question are true by virtue of capturing a social reality. It also has subjectivist
elements for the truth of the claims made by each party to the debate depends
on their perspective, understood in terms of their social location. It is also
possible to make progress in thinking about the framework reading on the
relativist model.

Recall that on the framework reading, Parents are not objecting to
Daughter's claim by denying it, but are instead rejecting the cute/dorky
framework. It is worth noting that there is a spectrum of possible responses
to a framework of this sort along two dimensions: first, the dimension of
understanding, second the dimension of *critique*. For example:

- One can accept a distinction but object to a particular application of its terms;
- One can accept a distinction but find it confusing or misguided and recommend conceptual revisions to it;
- One can object to a distinction and refuse to employ it, but still be able to "mimic" applications of it (as if with shudder quotes);
- One can find a distinction incoherent.

Similarly social structures, particularly their schemas, may be more or less *accessible* from other structures (this corresponds to the dimension of understanding), and may be more or less in *harmony* (this corresponds to the dimension of critique). For example, the structure of seventh grade East Coast urban social life is relatively accessible to me because I have lived within or near that milieu and its schemas are encoded in the material world around me: on billboards and shop windows, in pop music and film; in daily inter-generational interaction. It is also the case, however, that the meaning of crop-tops in my milieu is utterly at odds with the meaning of crop-tops for seventh grade girls. Correlatively, many of the cultural schemas of the immigrants on my street are relatively inaccessible to me, but our milieus are not at odds.

How should we understand the case in which Parents—let's call these the Radical Parents—are not just rejecting the Daughter's evaluation of crop-tops as cute, but are entirely rejecting the cute/dorky framework? Can a relativist model help with this sort of case? Schemas for 'cute' and 'dorky' are not part of Radical Parents' social milieu (or there is insufficient overlap with Daughter's schemas) and they have no intention to import meaning or enter a social milieu in which they have meaning. Daughter's milieu is sufficiently accessible to them that they have some comprehension of the dichotomy, but the disharmony between Radical Parents' schemas and Daughter's is so great that they refuse to invoke the schemas lest they be reinforced; they are refusing to collaborate in the collective definition of cuteness. Although Radical Parents don't disagree with Daughter by denying what she asserts, they do reject her claim (relative to their milieu); in their denial they use the terms 'cute' and 'dorky' with shudder quotes. This suggests that he degree of genuine disagreement over the truth-value of the claims in question will be, to a substantial extent, a function of the accessibility and harmony of the milieus.

VI. Critique

Social milieu relativism provides a model of how Daughter and Parents might both be saying something true and important, and yet seem to contradict each other. However, a crucial problem remains: in what sense,

if any, should the daughter believe that crop-tops are *not* cute? How can we make sense of the suggestion that Parents are right and that Daughter's social reality is in some sense illusory? The problem is that if social truth is relative to milieu, then it would seem that we have no basis for adjudicating social truths across milieus. If crop-tops are cute in Daughter's milieu and they aren't in Parents' milieu, what can Parents do or say beyond exposing Daughter to their milieu and hoping she will be moved (as MacFarlane suggested) to coordinate with them? What we were looking for, initially, is a basis for genuine critique. And we don't have that yet.

The easy and inadequate answer draws on the epigraphs we started with. Both Taylor and MacKinnon emphasize that a key element in recognizing the illusion in one's social context is to see that how things are is not how they must be:

> A study of the science of man is inseparable from an examination of the options between which men must choose. (Taylor)

> Women's situation cannot be truly known for what it is, in the feminist sense, without knowing that it can be other than it is. (MacKinnon)

A simplistic hypothesis might be that once one is exposed to a different social reality by engaging with assessors from another milieu, one will come to see the weaknesses of one's own milieu. On this view, the very exposure to another milieu, even to a milieu that is not objectively better, can destabilize an investment in one's current (inadequate) milieu and provide opportunities for improvement. Critique, strictly speaking, is not necessary; one need only broaden the horizons of those in the grip of an unjust structure and they will gain "consciousness" and gravitate to liberation.

It is true that such destabilization can happen, but it is far from guaranteed; and there is a danger that not all such gravitation is toward liberation. Admittedly, both Taylor and MacKinnon only suggest that such exposure to alternatives is a necessary, not sufficient, condition for seeing through the illusion. There are two other options to consider for grounding critique.

First, it is compatible with relativism about social truth that one be an objectivist about moral and/or epistemic value. So there might be an objective basis for privileging some social milieus so that truth relative to those milieus is more valuable or more "sound" than truth relative to others. For example, compared to others, some milieus base their schemas on more epistemically sound practices, e.g., allow greater freedom of speech and thought that promotes open inquiry, and welcome the evolution of structures in response to internal critique. The idea is that if some milieus are epistemically privileged relative to others, those in less (epistemically) privileged milieus ought to accept the critique of a practice from a more

(epistemically) privileged milieu.[13] One might make a similar move for privileging morally or politically sound milieus.

This is in many ways appealing. One challenge for such a view, would be to provide a basis for evaluating epistemic and moral practices that was not itself relative to milieus. Is it possible to evaluate the epistemic practices of a milieu by standards that are not themselves milieu-relative? If not, then it is possible that by the epistemic standards of Daughter's milieu, her milieu is more sound and by the epistemic standards of Parents' milieu, theirs is more sound, and we still lack an objective basis for critique. This is less of a problem in domains where there is an independence of fact against which we can evaluate different epistemic standards: is this practice truth-conducive or not? But in the social domain our epistemic practices, like other practices, can generate facts to be known, and even if a practice is truth-conducive, it may be problematic. For example, suppose in the seventh grade milieu there is a norm that everyone should agree with Hannah (e.g., about what's cute, dorky, fun, boring . . .). If this norm is followed, there will be a coordination of beliefs and responses that constitute social facts which can be effectively known by following the Hannah-agreement norm. However, the hope, on this quasi-objectivist approach, would be to establish conditions on epistemic (or moral) norms, e.g., of universality, that downgrade milieus governed by norms like Hannah-agreement. But we must ask: what makes such conditions objective?

A second strategy would be to develop a notion of critique that requires more than just truth relative to the milieu of the assessor. For example, suppose the assessor's claim is a genuine critique of a speaker's only if there is some common ground (factual, epistemic, or social) between the speaker's milieu and assessor's milieus, and the assessor's claim is true relative to the common ground. To say that a critique is genuine, in this sense, is not to say that it is the final word; rather, it is to say that a response is called for.[14] This further condition could explain why the dialogue between Daughter and Parents seems at best incomplete and at worst pointless. For Parents to have a critique of Daughter's choices, they should offer more than a flat denial of her claim relative to their milieu; it is their responsibility to seek common ground from which Daughter can assess their critique. If Parents can find common ground with Daughter and their claim that crop-tops are not cute is true relative to that common ground, then because Daughter shares that ground, she must address Parents' concern; hopefully, the two sides will continue to engage until they reach a mutually acceptable common ground.

An advantage of this notion of critique is that it would help make sense of the idea that ideology critique is transformative. If critique isn't just a matter of reasoned disagreement, but is a matter of forming or finding a common milieu, then because a milieu is partly constituted by dispositions to experience and respond in keeping with the milieu, then possibilities for agency other than those scripted by the old milieu become socially

available. In keeping with this, we might want to distinguish *critique* (in the transformative sense) from mere *criticism* (in the ordinary sense).

However, the notion of a "common ground" is symmetrical between parties to the debate, but we're looking for a basis for *privileging* some milieus over others. So more will need to be said to set conditions on a legitimate common ground. In the example we've been considering, I've assumed it is clear that Parents are right and Daughter is wrong about the appropriateness of crop-tops for seventh grade girls. But consider a case in which (one might argue) Daughter is right and Parents wrong, e.g., Daughter wants to participate in a demonstration for a worthy cause that she and her friends believe in, and Parents object, or Daughter wants to take a girl to the school dance, and Parents object. (Such examples show that the soundness of a milieu is not, or not simply, a matter of the extent to which it is endorsed or its sensitivity to consequences.)

To begin, one might set conditions on an adequate common ground to exclude those formed through coercive measures; conditions should also be sensitive to information available to each side (it may be useful to consider Longino's (1990) discussion of scientific objectivity and collective knowledge). This strategy is promising, but it is a huge task to figure out what conditions will give the right results. And there is a danger of idealizing the conditions by which something counts as common ground to the point that genuine ideology critique is impossible to achieve.

VII. Conclusion

I've argued that there are puzzles in understanding how social critique, or ideology critique, can work. If ideology partly constitutes the social world, then a description of the ideological formations will be true, and it is unclear what is, epistemically speaking, wrong with them. We may be in a position to provide a moral critique of social structures, and this remains invaluable; but moral critique can be too abstract or controversial to have an effect. The material world reinforces our tutored dispositions—qwerty keyboards reinforce our qwerty dispositions which reinforce the use of qwerty keyboards; racial classification reinforces racial segregation, which reinforces racial identity, which reinforces racial classification. Social structures, good or bad, constitute our lived reality and are common sense for us. Ideology critique requires not only a normative shift, but a critique of our schemas for interpreting and interacting with the world and a critique of the reality these schemas form.

Although I have not argued for a particular account of ideology critique, I have offered a relativist model that helps make sense of how two sides of a social issue may disagree and yet both be saying something true, and I have suggested strategies for developing an account of critique; on one such

strategy, critique is not merely a matter of changing beliefs, but of creating social spaces that disrupt dominant schemas. This, I believe, is consistent with the value and the power of consciousness raising. The challenge remains, however, to explicate and justify when a change of consciousness is genuinely emancipatory, and when it is just more ideology, in the pejorative sense.

Notes

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2. Roughly, consciousness raising considers the way in which social thought and social reality are interdependent, offers a critical perspective on the meanings implicit in this thought-imbued reality, and proposes alternative meanings gained from a perspective within the social context in question. I will not dwell on what consciousness raising is or what its epistemic credentials are.
3. Following Lewis (1969, 56), the state of affairs of certain (popular) girls wearing crop-tops is the basis for the common knowledge that seventh grade girls are wearing crop-tops this spring.
4. In fact, there are a number of different ways one might construe the speech act Parents perform other than a straightforward denial of Daughter's assertion. A rejection of the cute/dork dichotomy is a plausible one, but there are others worth considering. I am not claiming that there is only one way to interpret Parents' contribution to the conversation.
5. Especially useful discussions of the notion of ideology include: Geuss 1981; Fields 1982; McCarthy 1990; Purvis and Hunt 1993; Shelby 2003.
6. Although there is much controversy over the question whether 'ideology' or the Foucauldian notion of 'discourse' is better suited to the role described here, the controversies are not directly relevant to my purposes. Moreover, there seems to be a core notion shared by both. See Purvis and Hunt 1993.
7. Sometimes ideologies are taken to be sets of beliefs, sometimes forms of "practical consciousness," that reside in the minds of individual agents; sometimes they are cultural phenomena presupposed somehow in collective social life; sometimes they are explicit theories articulated by politicians, philosophers and religious figures, among others. The causal or explanatory role of ideology within a broader social theory is also unclear. (Geuss 1981; Elster 1985, 468-9, Marx 1970/1846, 36-7).
8. It is a controversial what counts as a "social fact." In my discussion I begin with the idea that social facts are "interpersonal" facts or facts that supervene on such facts. So, simplifying considerably, *I am Deb's friend* is a social fact because it supervenes on a certain base set of interpersonal actions and attitudes. Others, such as John Searle (1995), have higher demands, including controversial "we-intentions," assignment of function, and the generation of constitutive rules.

These elements are more plausibly required in creating institutional facts or conventional facts; his analysis is too demanding to capture much of ordinary informal social life. E.g., we can have coordinated intentions without them being "we-intentions;" things can have a social function even if they aren't assigned it; and social kind membership isn't always governed by rules.

9. As Howard (1994) notes, the concept of a sociocognitive schema, leaves many questions unanswered, e.g., how and when are such schemas formed both in the individual and in the culture? What explains their formation and disruption? How are they transposed? (etc.)

10. See: http://www.blueofthesky.com/publicart/works/joanofarc.htm

11. There are complexities I won't address in how to interpret Ginger's utterance of Fred's original sentence, e.g., is she denying Fred's token utterance or the proposition he is expressing? Note, however, that even if we allow the "hidden indexical" to continue to track Fred, Ginger succeeds in disagreeing, but her claim is false, not true: It is not the case that this oatmeal is-yummy-to-Fred.

12. More needs to be said about the individual who offers a critique that is at odds with the operative social structure. This, after all, is the feminist critic whose intervention is the real subject of this essay. Although the proposal I've developed characterizes the individual's social milieu as the one operative in the context for that individual—even if it is not endorsed or internalized—the possibility of being at odds with this operative structure is important for thinking about the location of social critique.

13. Drawing on Longino's analysis of scientific objectivity, one might, e.g., privilege milieus that meet certain standards for the diversity of and equal consideration of epistemic agents. (Longino 1990)

14. This sort of idea can also be found in MacFarlane 2006.

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