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CHAPTER 2

POSTSTRUCTURAL METHODOLOGIES - THE BODY, SCHOOLING AND HEALTH.

Jan Wright

POSTSTRUCTURALIST THEORY AND RESEARCH

Postmodernism and poststructuralism often appear to be used interchangeably in educational writing and research, with the term postmodernism more likely to be used in North America and poststructuralism more likely to be used by those following a European tradition of philosophy and social analysis (Scheurich 1997). There are arguably, however, differences that go beyond terminology. The latter position tends to draw on the work of Foucault and Derrida, the former on the work of Lyotard. Different questions are raised and considered by each. What they share is 'the need to problematise systems of thought and organisation' (Usher and Edwards 1994: 1) and fixed notions of identity or social relations. In addition, the term postmodernity is also used globally to describe a period which some suggest has already passed and others, has yet to arrive (Giddens 1991; Kirk 1997). This chapter is not so much concerned with the debates about terminology or about postmodernity as a period. It looks at how poststructuralist theory can help to understand the relationship between the self and the social and, specifically for the purposes of this book, how the embodied self is socially constituted in relation to social institutions and discourses associated with health and physical education.

One of the strengths of poststructuralism is that it comes from a tradition that already has an analytic theory and a useful set of analytic techniques with which to undertake research. While not all poststructuralist researchers necessarily interrogate texts as social instantiations, there is a thread of poststructuralism which comes directly out of linguistics, that is, after the structuralist linguistics of Saussure and Levi-Strauss (see Silverman 1983). Through the work of Saussure, meaning has come to be understood as not fixed, but as historically and culturally specific. What 'health' means, for instance, has changed, even in the context of the English-speaking world, quite radically over the last century (Lupton 1995) and, as has been argued by those concerned with the health of Indigenous peoples, is differently understood by different cultural and socio-economic groups (Wright and Burrows 2003). With the work of Raymond Barthes, structuralism was extended to the study of cultural texts and through his notion of myths to an understanding of how particular meanings came to be more powerful or 'hegemonic' than others, that is, how some meanings took on the status of taken-for-granted truths (Barker and Galasinski 2001). If we look at the chapters in this book, many challenge the ways in which particular versions of health (e.g. Gard Chapter five), childhood (e.g. Burrows and Wright Chapter six), the body and physical education are accepted as the dominant ones.

As Hall (1992, cited in Barker and Galasinski 2001) points out structuralism was important because it allowed for all forms of meaning production, including 'lived experience', to be treated as texts. Thus, ethnographies, interviews, journals, narratives, even physical movements as they are documented by video or in the form of field notes could now be analysed as texts. This tradition, therefore, provided both

the justification and the means – through structural linguistics and semiotics - to systematically interrogate the meanings of texts (written, spoken or visual) as they are constituted in and by specific social and cultural contexts. Institutionally such work often comes under the umbrella of cultural and/or communication studies and/or critical discourse analysis (see, for instance, Fairclough 1989, 1995; Luke, *et al.* 1994). In this paper, and in most of the chapters in the book which use 'discourse' as an analytic technique, a notion of discourse analysis, drawing more or less on the work of Foucault, has been used to conceptualise and deconstruct the relations both within and between physical and health education, the body, identity and health, as socially constructed domains.

Foucault (1972: 49) describes discourse as 'practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak. Discourses are not about objects; they constitute them and in the practice of doing so conceal their own intervention'. It is through discourse that meanings, subjects, and subjectivities are formed. Although in this sense discourse is not equivalent to language, choices in language – for instance, choosing to define overweight as an illness - point to those discourses being drawn upon by writers and speakers, and to the ways in which they position themselves and others. Questions can, therefore, be asked about how language works to position speakers (and listeners) in relation to particular discourses and with what effects? Further, poststructuralism, by its very nature, raises questions about how selves are constituted, how power-knowledge relations change across times, places, and in the context of different social, political, and cultural contexts. These are the kinds of questions explored in a number of the analyses in this volume. Burrows and Wright

Chapter six, for instance, look at the social construction of childhood in relation to particular healthism discourses that define the child as a biological entity whose present and future well-being is put at risk through decreasing participation in physical activity and the excessive consumption of 'junk' food.

The notion of discourse provides a means to understand what resources are available to individuals as they make sense of the world and themselves in the world. What it does not provide is an explanation as to why some, rather than others, are taken up by individuals and why different individuals take up the same discourses in different ways. Part of the answer to these questions lies in the relation between power and discourse. Some discourses have more power to persuade than others and are reiterated more often across a wide range of sites and/or by those who are believable and understood to be expert. For Foucault, this is covered by the notion of technologies of power – that is, 'those technologies which determine the conduct of individuals and submit them to certain ends or domination, an objectivising of the subject' (Foucault 1997: 225). In his early work, Foucault was interested in mapping, or constructing a genealogy of, the emergence of particular regimes of truth as they emerged in specific institutional contexts, specifically in relation to the science, medicine and particularly in *The Birth of the Clinic*, psychiatry. In doing so Foucault sought to show the 'specificity and materiality' of the interconnections between power and knowledge (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1986: 203). For Foucault, power is not primarily located in structures or in an all powerful state apparatus, rather institutions act as specific sites where particular techniques of power are channelled and brought to bear on individuals in systematic ways. In this way a school, through its

architecture, its organisation, its curriculum and daily practices, becomes a disciplinary site which draws on particular regimes of truth (discourses) to legitimate its existence and to define what it does. Thus, for example, particular pedagogical practices in physical education, such as those associated with assessment, the organization of classes based on ability, the measuring of bodies for weight, fitness and so on, even the ways in which teams are chosen can work to produce 'normalising', 'regulating', 'classifying', and 'surveillance' effects.

While Foucault was more interested in his earlier writing with the ways in which individuals are subjected to particular operations of power, his later work was more concerned to understand how individual selves are constituted; how the 'truth games' that he identified through his genealogical analyses of knowledge fields are taken up by individuals and in what circumstances. He used the concept of 'technologies of the self' to describe the ways in which individuals engage in psychic practices which

permit individuals to effect by their own means, or with the help of others, a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality.

(Foucault 1997: 225)

While he specifically focused on the ways in which this happened in the context of early Greek and Christian writings, his notion of 'technologies of the self' helps us to look more closely at the diverse ways in which individuals take up, resist and

challenge the discourses associated with health, the body and physical activity. If we understand that notions of 'perfection', 'happiness', 'purity', 'wisdom' are themselves socially constituted, we can begin to understand why individuals might take up certain discourses rather than others. An example, which will be developed below, is the way in which specific notions of bodily perfection or normality are promoted via a wide range of social institutions including, but not only, schools and the media. Individuals in their desire to attain such perfection avidly consume information that provides instructions on what they must do to achieve this.

In another example, which is particularly relevant to the example of poststructuralist analysis described later in this chapter, perfection/happiness in western societies, is also associated with a coherent sense of self. In this sense the self becomes a project, work has to be done on the self to maintain a sense of coherence and rationality. Such a humanist notion of the self is critiqued by those drawing on poststructuralist theory, which sees selves/subjectivities/identities as multiple and constantly constituted in and through discourse. However, as Edley (2001: 195) points out (writing in the context of discursive psychology) there is a powerful discourse which would want to see individuals as 'unique, self-contained motivational and cognitive universes.' He argues that

most people in the Western world are invested in a philosophical tradition which values personal integrity and the consistency of identity over time. Westerners are very keen to be seen, by themselves as well as others, as *someone* in particular. This explains why when people are encouraged or

forced to see the contradictions in their own identity 'project', they often feel defensive or embarrassed.

(Edley 2001: 195)

In other words individuals have investments in seeing themselves as coherent selves which have continuity over time. In looking at interview texts (which are after all dynamic constructions of subjectivities – both the interviewer's and the interviewee's), the work individuals do to maintain this coherence as well as to constitute particular kinds of subjectivities will be recognisable in their choices of language.

DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

In this chapter 'discourse' has been discussed as it is used by those working from a poststructuralist perspective. 'Discourse', however, is a widely used term having a range of different technical meanings and uses in social research. In the introduction to *Discourse as Data*, Taylor (2001) provides a very helpful description of a range of discourse analytic processes and their underpinning assumptions and consequent ways of working with data. Discourse analysis is a term widely used by those interested in 'looking closely at 'language in use' where the analyst is 'looking for patterns' (Taylor 2001: 6). However, how 'language' is interpreted determines the approach to discourse analysis. From a poststructuralist perspective, discourse analysis is the term used to describe the process of capturing regularities of meaning (patterns in language use) as these are 'constitutive of discourses and to show how discourses in turn constitute aspects of society and the people within it' (Taylor 2001: 9).

One of the key assumptions to an analysis of language and other social meaning making practices is that as people talk, write or construct images, indeed, act in relation to themselves and to others, they are making choices – choices which are limited by the repertoires of meaning-making tools (language, film angles, colours), repertoires of movement and so on, that they have available. Not all individuals have access to the same set of institutional or cultural resources, and the effects of taking up some ways of acting and meaning are not equally valued in all social contexts. Although Edley refers only to language, his point in the following quote makes sense in relation to a whole range of meaning making practices.

A language culture may supply a whole range of ways of talking about or constructing an object or event, and speakers are therefore bound to make choices. However the options aren't always equal. Some constructions or formulations will be more available than others. They will be easier to say.

(Edley, 2001: 190)

In physical education, for example, there have been several examples of ways in which choices in language contribute to the production of gender (Clarke 1992; Evans *et al.* 1996; Wright, 1995, 2000) and of ways of thinking about and making choices about health and physical activity (Wright and Burrows 2003).

Most of the data-based or empirical poststructuralist research in education draws on qualitative methodologies, although it is not unimaginable that numbers might be involved. Researchers tend to use interviews, observations, collect documentation,

and take field notes. If specifically interested how language or visual images work to constitute meanings and subjectivities, they may record teacher-student interactions, or collect media texts. In keeping with the theoretical basis of poststructuralism that takes knowledge as socially constructed, researchers do not claim to be capturing truths, rather they are concerned with how individuals, groups, cultures and institutions construct realities and with what effects. In doing so they also recognise that information collected can be only partial, situated in terms of time and place and the context of the specific situation (e.g. the interview or observation).

INVESTIGATING THE RELATION BETWEEN EDUCATION, PHYSICAL CULTURE AND IDENTITY: AN EMPIRICAL EXAMPLE

Moving now from theoretical considerations to the use of poststructuralism for empirical work in physical education, it is useful to consider what questions a researcher might want to ask. Some questions have already been suggested in earlier sections of this paper and many others are explored in the remaining chapters in this book. Health and physical education provides a rich site for examining specific relations between schooling, the body and identity (or in poststructuralist terms, subjectivity). It provides a context in which to ask questions such as: How are bodies inscribed with meanings? What part does schooling and physical education play in this process and with what effects? What institutional and cultural discourses are brought into play to construct particular identities and social practices associated with health, sport, physical activity in the context of schools? What kinds of selves/bodies are regarded as normal and what not? Who has the power to determine this and on what authority (discursive or structural) do they draw?

Several papers in the book exemplify how some of these questions might be addressed (e.g. Leahy and Harrison Chapter nine; Rich, Holroyd, Evans, Chapter twelve; Clarke, Chapter thirteen). To demonstrate in detail what empirical work might look like using a poststructuralist approach, the remainder of this chapter will work through an example which begins by identifying the work of specific discourses as they are constituted in the institutional site of physical and health education textbooks and concludes by demonstrating how these discourses are taken up by young woman Karin, as she talks about herself and describes the choices she makes in relation to physical activity and eating.

The assumption from a poststructuralist perspective is that subjectivities are constituted by drawing on existing discourses or sets of meaning. In the case to be discussed below, an important aspect of recognising and naming the discourses on which Karin draws is to identify the possible ways of making meanings about health currently available to her. Not all meanings about health will have the same salience for all individuals and in all contexts. Part of the empirical task in this case is to identify which discourses have most salience for Karin and with what consequences. One possible first step, then, in this process is to identify institutional and cultural texts that are likely to serve as important sources of the discourses which constitute the field of inquiry. In Karin's case, these are likely to be the popular media, schools and other institutions concerned with health. Texts from these sources will provide indications of how discourses are constituted and how these become invested with personal and cultural desires, needs and so on. For example, popular magazines may

provide instructions in how to exercise to become thinner, but thinness only becomes a desirable goal when connected to cultural ideals of attractiveness and/or the moral virtue of the well-disciplined body. In many cases there is a literature which has already begun the work of identifying the discursive field. In addition, as researchers, workers and participants these fields we are also likely to be very familiar with the range of discourses, dominant and otherwise, circulating. It is then a matter of systematically documenting discourses and the work they do.

Another way of working is take a more grounded approach and look for patterns in meaning making through an analysis of the language of interviews, classroom interaction, school programs and so on. Since a fundamental assumption of poststructuralism is that individuals in constituting texts draw on discourses (some dominant and others marginal) which are already circulating in particular social and cultural contexts, the task when working from this direction is to determine where these are found, who else is articulating them, with what power do they speak (or write) and with what effects.

In this case there is now a considerable literature which discusses the dominant discourse of health and their means of production and dissemination in western society (see for instance, Lupton 1995; Peterson and Bunton 1997). However, for the purposes of this example, the first step to understanding the salience of the particular discourses on which Karin draws will be to investigate specific meanings about health generated in school health education classes. In this case the focus will be on health education textbooks. Another possible or complementary focus could have been the

language of the health classroom (see for instance Leahy and Harrison Chapter nine). This step is concerned, then, to look at a key institutional site in which discourses are constituted as regimes of truth, in this case as ways of thinking about, evaluating and acting on the body in relation to its health.

To illustrate the meanings that are made available in the context of health and physical education I have chosen several texts on the same topic from health and physical education textbooks widely used in both the junior school and for the senior examinable course in New South Wales (Davis *et al.* 1993; Fitzgibbons *et al.* 1993; Parker *et al.* 2000; Rhineberger *et al.* 1994). What could be asked of the textbooks as a whole is: what meanings about health are constructed in these texts? What is the relationship between health and the body/identity/the self? What discourses do writers draw on and with what consequences for how individuals and groups are to be understood and the behaviours evaluated; what messages are produced as to how people are to live their lives? Such a large scale analysis is not possible within the scope of this paper but is certainly important when choosing and using textbooks to recognise that they are productive of social meanings and provide resources for the ways in which individuals come to know themselves and others. For the purpose of this chapter, following the particular theme of the body, physical activity and health, I have chosen the sections of these textbooks that deal with the relationship between energy, food, activity and the body.

These texts all indicate that the way to think about the relationship between food and activity/exercise is one of 'balance' - energy/kilojoules in and energy/kilojoules out.

The metaphor of a seesaw is used in each textbook and often made explicit in the diagrams that accompany the text. What is of interest here is how these specific texts are instructive in ways of thinking and evaluating the body and suggestive to the reader of ways of thinking and acting. Each text in very similar ways suggests that individuals/ readers should engage in a process of self-monitoring, whereby they calculate what they eat and how that is balanced by the exercise they do. Resources are provided to do this; tables list the energy value of common foods and the energy expenditure of different forms of activity. The message is clear: eat too much and too many of the wrong kinds of foods, and more exercise will be required to work it off. In the following quote, the text directly addresses the reader inviting them to calculate their daily energy balance.

In order to calculate daily caloric expenditure, add to your BMR the calorie or kilojoule cost of the various activities that make up your day. The energy expenditure of each activity can be calculated by measuring the amount of oxygen used to perform the activity.

(Davis, Kimmet and Auty, 1993:134)

An example of a record chart is provided to help with the calculations. It is unlikely to be a coincidence that the topic immediately following 'Energy Balance' is 'Overweight and Obesity' – the two are closely linked discursively; that is, if the prescriptions offered in the first chapter are not followed then the consequences are described in the second.

The second step in the analytical task is to look at how these ways of making sense of the relationship between health and the body are taken up by individuals as they work 'to attain a certain mode of being' (Foucault 1997: 225). A section from an interview with Karin is used to exemplify the way in which a discourse analysis can be used to address this question. Karin's texts are derived from the corpus of interviews collected for a project investigating the place and meaning of physical activity and physical culture in young people's lives (see Wright, Macdonald and Groom (2003) for further details).

The interview begins with a brief exchange about Karin's family's current and past involvement in physical activity and the value they do or don't place on her participation in sport. The interviewer then asks Karin about her definition of health. The kinds of meanings which Karin draws on to construct a response in the first instance respond very closely to the kinds of meanings which seem to be promoted in most health related classes and in the media (see, for example, Leahy and Burrow Chapter nine; Burrows and Wright Chapter six) and which seem widespread in both this research and other research concerned with the meaning of health. Health is about eating healthy food (and not 'junk' food) and engaging in exercise. How much exercise and for what purposes becomes more evident as the interview progresses, but again like the students in Burrows' and Wright's study (Wright *et al.*; Burrows and Wright Chapter six) it is primarily associated with fitness. What is also evident in this first excerpt is the notion of 'balance', a balance between food in and energy out through exercise. A set of meanings as has been already established, reiterated in many physical and health education textbooks. As Karin's choices in language

suggest, she takes this construction of health to be common knowledge, the interviewer should be able to fill in the gaps of 'Basically all that stuff'.

As the interview progresses Karin elaborates on her constructions of healthy (and not-healthy food). Again she assumes (and quite rightly in terms of the power of the discourse) that there is a clear distinction between health and junk food – 'pizza' falls into the category of the latter – and that this understanding is shared by the interviewer. As Lupton points out fast food or food produced away from the home is regarded negatively in the context of the binaries of natural/artificial and unprocessed/processed. As she also points out that these are 'cultural constructs that ignore the realities of food production and distribution in modern societies' (Lupton 1996: 91).

Int: What is your definition of health?

Karin: Um, health. It is trying to be fit. Um, eating healthy food, you know, have a balance of food and all that stuff. Getting enough exercise. Basically all that type of stuff.

Int: Would you say that you're pretty healthy?

Karin: Oh, I don't know about that. I'm not very fit. I try to eat the right foods all the time, except for the occasional pizza, haha. But I don't know. I think that I get through life, you know, maybe I could try to be a bit healthier. I guess. Try to get fit. In summer I try to do a bit more exercise but winter it's too cold around here, way too cold in the night-time.

In the next section of the interview it becomes clearer that meanings around food and eating are not simply about health, although, in talking about her own practices she continues to draw on what she seems to understand as a shared understanding of meanings. Healthy food is 'vegies and fruit and stuff like that' even if they come from the freezer. In this section of the interview, Karin demonstrates how, for her, the most important discursive resources in how she evaluates and makes sense of her body are those associated with the relationship between energy in and energy out through exercise and those which provide instruction as to how she can best engage in personal practices that ensure that the balance is one where she loses weight. In terms of Foucault's notions of 'technologies of the self', Karin's descriptions of what she seeks to do can be understood in terms of a socially constituted notion of perfection – the 'ideal body' defined in terms of contemporary notions of femininity. Her happiness depends on her pursuit and attainment of that body. This becomes quite explicit in the last excerpt from the interview when Karin talks about how happy she was when she was in Years six and seven at school, she 'was really skinny then', before she 'shot up'. It seems to be a happiness that she has continued to strive to achieve through a constant monitoring of her weight and her appearance. Perfection is also signified by the comments of others and a lack of 'perfection' in the ways she feels physically in her body – she talks, for instance, about feeling 'terrible', 'lazy' and 'fat and ...so oily' when she has missed hockey for a week: 'You know you haven't worked off any energy so you feel heavy and, just like you miss the little exercise you need to feel normal'. Normality has become embodied as a material/sensual experience; the feelings that occur when her personal practices move beyond what it takes to be

normal are uncomfortable and serve to motivate her to eat less and exercise more. Discourses that link fitness and health with thinness become entangled with fitness as the ability to play hockey well, to be able to cover the field and to be seen to be a 'good player'.

Int: So you mentioned before about health that it involved eating right, what did you mean?

Karin Oh, like I try to, like it's not a matter of eating veggies and fruit and stuff like that. Like I like it and I'll eat it if it is put down in front of me, but otherwise I couldn't be bothered to go to the freezer and cooking some vegies, like I mean, come on no way, haha. But I mean, like earlier this year I was like fatter than I am now, like really, I had about 15kilos extra on me. Yeah, and I was really determined to lose the weight. So I started on a diet type thing. Not necessarily a diet but I exercised regularly, cause it was summer and I just cut down from eating, ... Now I have roughly three muffins, the English muffins, I would have three of them a day and that would do me for the whole day. Yep, that's all I would eat, muffins all day. And I loved it. But now after the holidays, because in the holidays I just eat what I want and now I find that I am eating more again. Not necessarily more, I just find that I eat two meals a day instead of one. Before it would be three muffins a day and I hardly drank anything. I was healthy on that. I felt fine. All my friends at school said 'you're malnourished'. But I felt great, you know, losing all this weight and being able to run onto a

hockey field. And I mean even people were noticing that I could run more on a hockey field. They were saying 'gees you are fitter than you used to be!' It made me feel great and I was healthy

Int: What were your goals?

Karin: To lose weight, to get fit for hockey, probably to clean up my skin, cause I knew if I didn't eat as much junk food that I wouldn't get as much junk food and stuff. And um I just wanted to look a bit better. You know how you feel? *You know, you feel better if you are what you want to be and I'm still not.* I would like to be skinnier than this, but, you know.

Int: Why?

Karin: Well, I would like to get fitter for hockey and the fitter you are the better you are. And I feel better about myself once you are where you want to be with weight wise and everything, you know. I mean you see obese people, you know, fatter people, at swimming pools and they are wearing shirts over their swimmers and you feel sorry for them. That's why I to get to a point where I am happy with my weight and the way I look and every thing like that, you know. So, I'd still like to lose a bit of weight but at the moment it's not happening, haha. No, I'm staying about average at the moment, which is ok, like at least it's better than putting it back on. But in summer I plan to loose at least another 10-15 kilos.

Int: Where did you find out information about this?

Karin: I didn't. I just figured it out. Like, when I was a little kid I was like a chubby kid. I was like fully a fat, chubby kid. And then I was fat until about year six and seven. And then I just grew. I shot up and I was really skinny then and I was happy and then I didn't change my eating style so naturally I just put on the weight, after I'd stopped growing. And then up until this year I have just kept eating normally and now it's just motivated, like I want to stay the way I am or just even better. Like, I mean, I would love to loose more weight, the fitter you are, the better you are, that's for me anyway. The fitter you are the healthier you are, I reckon.

Int: Were you happy during the holidays?

Karin: I was really worried the whole time that I was going to put on weight. I enjoyed eating the food, but every second, like a soon as I saw it, or as soon as picked it up, I thought 'no.' I needed some one to re-sure me that I wasn't going to put on weight straight away. I would say to mum, 'will this hurt me, how much weight will I put on?' And she was going, 'just eat the damn thing!' Anyway, she probably got sick of me asking, but I was really worried that I was going to put on weight cause it's so hard to get off and you don't want o put it all back on, especially now. Like you don't want to have done all of this for nothing.

One last indication of the work that Karin does to maintain her sense of self as coherent and appropriate is the ways in which she deals with alternate evaluations of her self and her practices. She reports comments from her parents, her boyfriend and her school friends that suggest that they are all in some way or another concerned with her health, her thinness and/or her eating practices. These are dismissed as misguided – her family and her boyfriend – or as evidence of their own 'slothfulness' and poor lifestyle - her friends. Karin's investments in continuing to follow a set of practices that, from her point of view, will keep her thin and healthy are very powerful. Their power is derived from a number of institutional sources. The popular media and the fashion and advertising industries promote a form of female beauty predicted on a degree of thinness, unavailable to most women without extreme regimes of dieting and exercise. School physical and health education syllabuses and textbooks draw on knowledge constituted in the disciplinary fields of epidemiological, medicine and nutrition to make the equation between exercise health and body weight/shape. This knowledge becomes recontextualised in the teaching and learning practices of the classroom. The power of these discourses around health is in the way they bring together the 'expertise' of science with desire – the health education textbooks provide the means to realise the ideal, to achieve perfection. Karin in this context is the ideal subject.

CONCLUSION

A concern with the relationship between the self/identity and society/culture is clearly not specific to poststructuralism, nor would most poststructuralist researchers limit their theoretical resources to Foucault. Most of the authors in the book draw on a

range of theoretical and empirical resources, some of which include forms of discourse analysis deriving from Foucauldian work, to formulate their research problems, their mode of inquiry and their interpretations of their data (see for instance Kirk Chapter four; Penney and Harris Chapter seven). What the contributors to the book share is a desire to interrogate, to ask questions about the ways in which institutional and cultural processes work to produce particular forms of identity or selves, particularly as these relate to the social construction and control of the body, well being and health.

What I have endeavoured to do in this chapter is to demonstrate how researchers might work with a poststructuralist approach to contribute to this project. It is not an approach that is usually described in research method textbooks, although the social construction of knowledge and identity is a fundamental assumption of most contemporary 'qualitative' research. An obvious starting point for those wishing to draw on this perspective are the many books by, and commentaries on, Foucault. Cultural studies and the sociology of pedagogy is a useful source for information on, and models of, textual analysis (see Barker and Galasinski 2001; Lee and Poynton 2000). As described earlier in this paper there are also now many studies from education and physical education which exemplify this approach.

Research drawing on a poststructuralist perspective offers a powerful means to make visible the relationships between the ways individuals construct their sense of self/their identity and the sets of social meaning and values circulating in society. Moreover this analysis also demonstrates how particular meanings are more powerful

than others through their relationship with institutionally privileged discourse, but also through their relationship with personal investments, desires and needs which are themselves cultural constituted. In relation to the specific concerns of this book, such an analysis allows us to understand how the social practices of physical education can contribute to taken-for-granted relationships between health, fitness and body shape and weight, that are in the first place not as certain as they are made out to be (see Gard and Wright 2001; Gard Chapter five) and in the second, potentially damaging as they promote practices injurious to health and well-being (see Robyne Garrett Chapter ten).

In other chapters in this book (e.g. Burrows and Wright, Chapter six; Gard, Chapter five) the writers take up the poststructuralist challenge of interrogating the relationship between power and knowledge and between discourse and subjectivity to further alert those working in the area of physical education and related fields that our knowledge is neither certain nor neutral in its effect and that the social practices we engage in (knowledge production and reproduction making, pedagogies, classificatory practices and so on) draw on particular technologies of power which in turn provide the resources for the ways selves are constituted.

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