



## **An Introduction to Social Psychology**

### *Agency-Structure Dualism*

#### **Ann Phoenix:**

If we take the Agency-Structure Dualism, this is a dualism that has been the heart of much social science and social psychological work. And basically, it's about the ways in which we think people either determine their own life courses, what happens to them, or they're determined by social structures. So the structure of society; the structure of the groups that they're within; the structure of their families. But also it sees the social context as broader, to do with wider social processes, to do with social class, gender, race.

#### **Wendy Hollway:**

The challenge is to try and think about ways in which we can be agents within the context of all these social influences and pressures, which themselves are multiple and conflicting and not just one thing. So I think we can't just talk about social structures, but we've actually got to talk very much more carefully about what sort of pressures there are at what levels and how they impinge together.

#### **Ann Phoenix:**

Quite often these two things have been polarised. One of the things that we want to get over very strongly in this course is that we can't polarise them, that we have to have both a view of agency being important to the way in which we understand the social world, and structure. That they always and ever operating together, that we can't separate them. That people always have some agency, they're never totally determined whatever the situation. And that they always are partially determined by the structures in which they are. So that it's not one or the other.

#### **Wendy S-Rogers:**

I think a good example is the way very recently we've gone from a situation where homosexual couples, whether they're male or female, did not have the ability to get married, and so the law was agentic to them. They had no agency. They couldn't suddenly decide that they'd go and get married because that wasn't legally possible. Whereas now we have civil partnerships, they can't get married but they can get most of the legal advantages of being married.

And so in a sense to be gay is slightly more agentic these days than it was even a couple of years ago.