

**Discourse analysis:** how does a **text as a whole** communicate its meanings - all of its meanings, both explicitly (on the surface) and implicitly (beneath the surface)?

Of course, one text does not exist in a vacuum - it is also part of a larger output of texts on similar, related topics, in related fields - its **wider discourse**.

This wider discourse is how ideologies (the commonly held beliefs, shared values and attitudes of a society/culture or a smaller group with a specific subculture) are established and reinforced.

### Activity 1: Children's clothes

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Find some images of children's t-shirts with gender biased slogans. Examples you might find:

- 'little terror'
- 'training to be Batman' / 'training to be Batman's wife'

What gender ideologies are conveyed in the clothes?

### Activity 2: International Women's Day

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What ideologies do you think are associated with 'International Women's Day'? Consider:

- explicit messages
- why we have such a day.

Here are some quotations used to celebrate International Women's Day:

**'Woman is the companion of man, gifted with equal mental capacity ...'**

**'If by strength is meant moral power, then woman is immeasurably man's superior ...'**

**'If non-violence is the law of our being, the future is with women ...'**

*Mahatma Gandhi*



## Gender ideologies in the quotations

1. What are these quotations explicitly trying to say with regard to gender ideologies? What gender ideology is it trying to promote in an obvious manner?
2. What are the quotations implicitly saying about women? How does this quotation uphold and reinforce some very traditional notions about gender?
3. Label some of the language features and explain how these work in this discourse (text as a whole). Some techniques you might notice:
  - connotations
  - semantic fields
  - metaphors
  - imagery

## Further questions

1. Why do you think the background colour of the promotional image was pink?
2. Where do you normally see the female symbol? How does this symbol relate to the equivalent used for men?
3. The noun 'woman' is used without any determiner (such as 'a' or 'the'). What is the effect of this?
4. The first clause 'woman is the companion of man' does have a determiner 'the'. What is the effect of that in the whole clause? What does it suggest about the noun 'woman'? This clause is also a declarative (making a statement). What effect does this have?
5. What is the effect of the conditional clause ('if-clause'): 'If by strength is meant moral power...' What does this suggest about 'strength' with regard to women?
6. There's a second conditional 'if-clause'. How does this affect our reading of the positive characteristics (according to Gandhi) of women?
7. What is the effect of the repeated use of the singular noun 'woman' instead of the plural 'women'?
8. According to Gandhi, women have three worthwhile characteristics: 'equal mental capacity', 'moral power' and 'non-violence' which are all abstract noun phrases. What does this suggest about women?
9. Those three noun phrases could be said to belong to the semantic field of good/positive character traits. What does this suggest about women?
10. Who is Mahatma Gandhi? Does it influence the way people perceive the text if they know it is from a well-known historical person?

### Teacher's answers

Some suggested answers and discussion points for exploring the gender ideology of the International Women's Day campaign:

1. Explicitly, the quotation is trying to convey a notion of equality between men and women, and perhaps even to convey a sense that women might be better than men in some areas. Ideologically, the two sexes complement each other: different but equal. This appears to fit with the idea of International Women's Day.
2. However, the quotation also promotes some sexist stereotypes: women are more moral and non-violent (gender ideology of women as nurturers and carers), by implication men are violent and aggressive (gender ideology).
3. 'Woman is the companion of man' suggests symmetry through the paired nouns 'woman' and 'man', yet the declarative sentence defines 'woman' in relationship to 'man', not as an independent entity in her own right.

This is reinforced by the repeated definition of 'woman' in relation to 'man' in the second paragraph, where the possessive form 'man's' is used to modify the positive noun 'superior'. Women are again defined in relation to men.

Furthermore, there are two conditional clauses 'if...' that specify the only situations in which women's superiority applies, which implicitly, is not really superiority at all. The text-image cohesion relies on using the stereotypical feminine colour pink, more often associated with sexist stereotyping and more traditional (sexist) gender ideologies than those which are with challenging sexism.