

Michel foucault in discipline and punish sociology essay



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Michel Foucault in *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality*, demonstrates that the tools of disciplinarity (which emerged in the confluence of critical, historical upheavals immediately preceding the modern age, such as geometric demographic expansion, reconfiguring global financial and mercantile apparatuses, the redefinition of territorial boundaries through global exploration and the ensuing establishments of empires, the ad hoc onset of the Industrial Revolution, etc.), upon being brought into proximity to about the only things that presently we are able to bring to it, such as a proclivity towards petty moralizing, our social prejudices, our racial intolerances, the petty agendas of the bourgeoisie – empirical lifestyle enclaves, etc., operate what they have been designed to do, namely the re-proliferation, expansion, multiplication, amplification, production of manipulated strategies for administering populations, under the guise of it redounding to the so-called “ public interest,” which on the whole underwrite unconscionable amounts of paralysis, social dissatisfaction and numerous suffering.

At the heart of Michel Foucault’s epistemic discussions on the reorganization of knowledge in the human sciences is his argument during the 1970s that such reshaping established contemporary arrangements of power and domination. Power, he defines, is the “ multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization.”[1] His comprehensive historical analysis on the advent of disciplinary apparatus in *Discipline and Punish* and discourses on compartmentalization of sex and sexuality, and bio-power in *The History of Sexuality* postulate an apparent political positioning of power in the sphere

of modernity, hence, paving way for a dynamic interpretation of his own understanding of it and the encompassing entity of knowledge.

This academic paper aims to expound on the place of power and knowledge in Foucault's historical studies on prison and other modern forms of disciplinary institutions, and scientific discourses about sexuality and its deployments. The paper is divided into two parts and will proceed accordingly. The first part comprises the reiteration of Foucault's claims on tools of disciplinary institutions as polymorphous, hence the interwoven appearance of new forms knowledge and power during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. By having constructed the reciprocity in the entrainment of knowledge and power in the context of the penal system, Foucault tries to demarcate the bounds of these two entities, but also ensures that each converge on the confines of modern disciplinarity (such as geometric demographic expansions). In other words, Foucault does not concern himself with distinguishing the "identity" of knowledge against power, or vice versa, but having and understanding knowledge and power in a "mutual reinforcing relation" so that each is "sustaining the authority of the other." [2]

This paper also argues that what drove the tools of disciplinarity as new forms of knowledge and power to operate the way they do, as in seemingly paralyzing humanity on its actions, is because, in the first place, they were programmed to act as the antithesis to the utopia vowed by the Enlightenment; hence are hostile to begin with, yet have been stabilized by man's hopeless state to resist them, as implied in the works of Foucault.

The second part is a critical analysis on two - viz. (1) pedagogization of children's sex, and (2) socialization of procreative behavior - of what Foucault labels as "four great strategic unities" that "formed specific mechanisms of knowledge and power centering on sex" at the start of the eighteenth century whence the proliferation of the production of sexuality started to surface and became a "historical construct." Their ontological and epistemological position allowed them to function in autonomy by which they imposed an explicit but restricted methodology in the generation and dictums of new knowledge saturated with sexuality - through which these deployments asserted their own perilous power.[3]

I

The underlying theme of the reorganization of knowledge in Foucault's works was broadened and highlighted by the introduction of the contemporary prison system in Discipline and Punish. By having the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries "explicitly set" in the realm of discipline, observation, and chains of restriction, Foucault made it possible in his book to produce new knowledge "even as they created new forms of social control." [4] The new penal system has "[i]ts fate...to be redefined by knowledge." [5] Davidson argues that Foucault's modern prison also serves as a "reference point" for his scrupulous analytics of power; [6] hence, the horrific revelation and comparison of the spectacle of the early eighteenth century punishment over the subtlety of the new penal structure - exemplifying the scope and the measure of steadiness of power throughout its transformations under different circumstances.

This is one of the most crucial points that Foucault purports. As mentioned above, the prevailing prison system became his reference point in the analytics of knowledge and power, and it is not hard to deconstruct why. As it were, it can be seen that Foucault was indulging himself in the line that separates the violent yet sporadic carrying out of detrimental force that targeted the body (e. g. public tortures and eventual public executions) and the imposition of a “ mass of juridical absurdities”[7]by the modern-day form of discipline:

It was a question not of treating the body, en masse, ‘ wholesale,’ as if it were an indissociable unity, but of working it ‘ retail,’ individually; of exercising upon it a subtle coercion, of obtaining holds upon it at the level of mechanism itself – movements, gestures, attitudes, rapidity: an infinitesimal power over the active body.[8]

The imposition of discipline reconstructs power in the manufacture of “ new” behavior – newfound techniques, newborn gesticulation, new actions – and ultimately, new breeds of people. Now, power is not merely power per se in its traditional sense, but it is a power that involves obedience on influence and exploitation. This is what Foucault meant in his discourse on “ docile bodies.” Indeed, “ the human body was entering a machinery of power that explores it, breaks it down and rearranges it.”[9]It is a power that is autonomous, ad hominem and utilitarian. Allen argues that those who discipline, apart from having a hold over the mobilization of others’ bodies, become compelled in always ricocheting back on “ specialist knowledge,” whence knowledge and power come into a mutual crisscross to finally augment each other. Everything comes in tandem: there can be no “
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criminology without prisons” or “ medicine without clinic” for knowledge is only possible in its compromise with the “ reciprocating patterns in the exercise of power.”[10]Borrowing the words of Robinson and Davies, disciplinary apparatuses, indeed, cater to a “ compulsory captive audience.”[11]“ Thus,” Foucault says, “ discipline produces subjected and practiced bodies, ‘ docile’ bodies.”[12]

The above mentioned means of subjection, along with the time cards, Bundy clocks, expected movements, documented schedules, etc., operated subtly through the shake-up of space and time by which peoples perform; hence, the formulation of an indirect flow of action, “ cellular segmentation,” and “ organic control,” given by the partitioning and distribution of activities. They “ served to economize the time of life” and “ to exercise power over men through mediation of time,” leaning on “ a subjection that has never reached its limit.”[13]

The above interventions paved way for the turn-around between power and perceptibility. There was a swing in political strategies from the presentation of power as spectacle to its employment in perceiving the target thoroughly, i. e., to see and hear him, to monitor and evaluate him, even at a distance. Surveillance, or panopticism, which proved to be far more complex than the sheer exhibition of force, became the autonomous impetus that massively drives action. By being “ everywhere,” surveillance forces the target to always stand on attention as he is “ constantly located;” it allows the disciplinary power to be “ absolutely indiscreet” and to be “ exercised without division:” an “ automatic functioning of power.”[14]

Rouse provided a physical description of surveillance. According to him, surveillance was not only manifest as affixed to the walls or structures of institutions, whose primary aim, again, was to enrich the capacity to perceive, but also in the "creation or extension of rituals," particularly examinations such as psychiatric tests, job interviews, meetings, and even military exercise wherein the commander only stands aside to witness the passing of a marching troop instead of actually being its forefront figure.[15]

Foucault's argument of panopticism and how it is improbable for people to not be observed shows its extent in *The History of Sexuality*. He argues that with the assimilation of the discourse of the sins of the flesh in the Catholic confession after the Council of Trent (Counter-Reformation), and even just traditional confession per se, the Church created a hold on its faithful by subjugating them to perfect obedience. Even through the screens of confessional boxes, one is compelled to allow himself to be audible, hence perceived, by an authority. Foucault argues:

We have since become a singularly confessing society. The confession has spread its effects far and wide. It plays a part in...the most ordinary affairs of everyday life, and in the most solemn rites; ...one goes about telling, with the greatest precision, whatever is most difficult to tell. One confesses in public and in private, to one's parents, one's educators, one's doctor, to those one loves; one admits to oneself, in pleasure and in pain, things it would be impossible to tell to anyone else, the things people write books about. One confesses-or is forced to confess...man has become a confessing animal.[16]

Such manifestations of panopticism and process of keeping records chains behavior exactly by the manner in which it creates more and more access for things and phenomena to be known. Yet, digging more deeply, it must be argued that such new forms of knowledge also assume new sets of constraints, which in turn allow people's movement to be perceived. Rouse asserts that such more specific knowledge makes room for also a more omnipresent constraint on people's actions – cycling towards the vast probabilities for “ more intrusive inquiry and disclosure.”[17]

These knowledge and power techniques have two-fold insinuations. First, they operated to control, or, to a higher extent, neutralize, societal factors that are deemed perilous and threat to what has already been established. Second, having controlled such unusual and abnormal elements, they provide an avenue for the enhancement of productivity and utilization of their subjects. By doing so, the use of these knowledge and power that was initially applicable only to quarantined institutions, such as prisons and mental wards – in other words, exclusive and extreme entities – was slowly emancipated and incorporated into an assortment of new contexts; hence allowing the expansion of their application. Foucault named this as the “ swarming of disciplinary mechanisms” and argues:

While, on the one hand, the disciplinary establishments increase, their mechanisms have a certain tendency to become ‘ de-institutionalized’, to emerge from the closed fortresses in which they once functioned and to circulate in a ‘ free’ state; the massive, compact disciplines are broken down into flexible methods of control.[18]

He adds that

On the whole, therefore, one can speak of the formation of a disciplinary society in this movement that stretches from the enclosed disciplines, a sort of social 'quarantine', to an indefinitely generalizable mechanism of 'panopticism'. Not because the disciplinary modality of power has replaced all others; but because it has infiltrated the others, sometimes undermining them, but serving as an intermediary between them...and above all making it possible to bring the effects of power to the most minute and distant elements.[19]

These present-day techniques ought not to be understood as a place-over upon prior structure/s. Instead, these practices ought to be realized as constituting wholly different objects for knowledge to be tickled. Amongst these new sets are strategic statistics and inputs, such as geometric demographic expansion, and the redefinition of territorial boundaries according to the continuing progressive development in International Relations; structures that incessantly tackles development, as in reconfiguration of global financial and mercantile apparatuses, or age-group and pedagogical attainments; distribution patterns, like income distribution in households, and a history of familial diseases like cancer and diabetes; and indications of the state of life like cholesterol and sugar count.

Consequently, such practices generate redefined, if not new enough, types of human subjects in consanguinity with another phase of production of new knowledge, objects, and power modalities.

These political practices constitute a very methodical comprehension of the individual, of course through the assistance of the elements that compose panopticism. Foucault, in *Discipline and Punish*, argues that such knowledge engraves a barrier that maintains the target's individuality – in his very own individuality. Hence, there is a permanence of knowledge, a knowledge by which the progress of the individuality of the target is always under scrutiny and evaluation.[20]

The more important thing, though, is that this knowledge of individuality, individuating comprehension – call it what you may – plays a crucial role in the economization and politicization of the population. In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault argues that peoples have also been singled-out, i. e., instead of dealing with “people” or “subjects,” the government has now shifted its attention and focused on dealing with a “population” with all its encompassing features that, just like the individual, had also been subjected to surveillance: mortality rates, healthiness, history of diseases, immunity to them, etc. All this individualizing of the people as a population always involve a reflux into the politic and economic in the population, i. e., population as labor force, population and efficiency in resource allocation, etc.[21]

Foucault associates the above knowledge on individuality with the regulation of the individualized people, or population, with the concept of normalization, which purports mutuality with the knowledge and comprehension of populations by determining distributions. Lorentzen argues that norms occupy the whole of society, yet impose the greatest influence on

institutions like church, school, and household;[22] in short, the ones that <https://assignbuster.com/michel-foucault-in-discipline-and-punish-sociology-essay/>

hold specific populations, such as students and families. Hacking, in his book *The Taming of Chance*, defined normal distribution as something that tries to promote constancy in numbers as implied in the survey of Europeans on their populations.[23] Along with certain populations, the individual also aids in the production of knowledge by being listed under a category; hence, he is epistemologically located without degrading into the standard. For Foucault, normalization is individualization because, although it “imposes homogeneity,” it also “individualizes by making it possible to measure gaps, to determine levels, to fix specialties and to render the differences useful by fitting them one to another.”[24]

In conclusion, it can be said that the influx of newly constructed knowledge and power operate today the way they do because they were meant to counter the premise and promise of the Enlightenment. Enlightenment was “the advance of thought”[25] that aims, in this case, to cultivate the prison and/or penal system as humanly as demanded by the modern society, and to emancipate mankind from sexual repression. But Foucault has presented it with a sense of hostility, if not real contradiction. As formerly vastly discoursed in this paper, the civilized prison and liberated sexuality further entangles humanity, and Foucault’s presentation of these entities addresses the materializing need to resist them as contemporary modes of knowledge and power. Yet, to go with this, he also insinuates that such resistance has no solid framework to come into existence, hence creating that in-between where there is a shocking paralysis engulfing man, and suffering and dissatisfaction looming amongst them.

II

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Some of the increase in child abuse is due to the publicity itself.[26]

– Ian Hacking

The History of Sexuality portrays the interrelation between knowledge and power through a historical account of the origin of the context of sexuality. It is not a given, but rather a “historical construct” of discourse. Its mode of deployments created new power relations – parents on their offspring, psychiatrists and doctors on patients, men on women, youth and old, etc. – and exercise further control on also extended areas; hence, were able to legitimize the knowledge it purports.[27]

Foucault discusses “four great lines of attack which the politics of sex advanced for two centuries,”[28] yet are still prevalent in the society today. Two of which shall be discussed shortly, viz. the pedagogization of children’s sex and socialization of procreative behavior.

Pedagogization of children’s sex. The convergence of knowledge and power in and on the bodies of children allows the gathering of data on what is medically appropriate for them, in congruence with what is also necessary for their educators and parents to maintain that medically appropriate environment, influence, and other factors in which they are deemed to operate upon.

A journal in 2008 by Kerry Robinson and Cristyn Davies regarding the relationship of sexuality with the childhood of Australian children ought to shed light on this first deployment under the scope of this paper. According to Robinson and Davies, the means by which Australian kids ought to acquire

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knowledge on sexual related phenomenon have been transformed into something “ controversial” by the great debates whether the pedagogy on sexuality ought to occur at home, under the supervision of parents, or at school by the children’s educators. Finally, for various reasons, the school was selected to address sexuality to children, yet Robinson and Davies argues that by the continuous denial of the education curricula on sexuality as an important part of children’s identities, childhood and sexuality become compartmentalized as purely social constructions by which there is a naturalization of heterosexuality as the norm of sexuality and hence strengthening heteronormativity amongst children.[29]

By having children perceived as docile bodies, schooling became a “ disciplining state apparatus,” whence the knowledge-power nexus operates through the imposition of knowledge-regulating documents, such as Health Curriculum and Health and Personal Development/Health/Physical Education (PH/H/PE), which constitute the heteronormativity of children as subjects.

[30]The practices involved in these documents gradually become assimilated in the general physical state of children, and whatever knowledge regarding sexuality was allowed to penetrate into the children’s minds “ was always highly regulated by social norms and religious taboos that depersonalised the processes for both the children and the teachers.”[31]

Earlier in 2007, Philo analyzed a radio broadcast that involved Foucault referencing to children’s games like tents around gardens or those that are played on top or under their parents’ beds. He argues that, indeed, what these games imply is an attention to the reverberating theme of “ wider trans-disciplinary field of social inquiries into children,” especially with <https://assignbuster.com/michel-foucault-in-discipline-and-punish-sociology-essay/>

sexuality, although he was apprehensive about some of Foucault's claims.

[32]

Both of the assertions of the above mentioned intellectual studies resonate to the underlying assumptions made by Foucault. On the one hand, Philo's article is a proof of half of the assertion of the deployment of sexuality currently at hand – that children have the natural inclination to participate in sexual activities; whilst, on the other, Robinson and Davies' study constitute the significant other half – that institutions, such as, in this case, school and families, are the intermediary entities that limit the dangerous sexual potential immanent in children.[33]

Given the above assumptions, it is easy to go back to the premise of Foucault's disciplinary apparatus and relate this pedagogization as one of its most influential tools. Putting into context Hacking's argument which was cited at the opening of this chapter, it can be said that such pedagogization does not much have of an impact to its intended target in children as much as it does for the people revolving around the target. With the prestigious promise of pedagogical, as well as medical, knowledge about sexuality on children, it has functioned as a regulatory tool in reshaping, and perhaps instilling imaginations that never surfaced until then, the minds of people in the hierarchy of societies that looks onto the children's. By knowing the constraints of teachers, doctors, and parents on maintaining the child's framework towards his sexuality, it has become easier for other people to imagine otherwise; hence, child abuse became and continues to become increasingly prevalent. In short, though the pedagogization of children's sex allows children to be oriented in a pre-defined structure, it has had become <https://assignbuster.com/michel-foucault-in-discipline-and-punish-sociology-essay/>

more of a tool for disciplinarity on the outside audience; therefore, another state of limbo, of paralysis, perpetuates around the surface of human action.

Socialization of procreative behavior. As it was scrupulously discussed at the earlier parts of this paper, population is one of the central themes of *The History of Sexuality*. Knowledge and power also converges on couples, allowing their growth on their circulation through the procreative capacity of the married pair.

What could be the perfect example of this deployment other than the components of the current debate on the Reproductive Health Bill? Yet its discussion remains to be written on another academic paper. The issues on fertility, regulating procreation through contraception and abortion, and enhancing human propagation through modern reproductive technologies circumscribe the married pair to function accordingly in this deployment of sexuality.

Indeed, often that this deployment of sexuality is understood in the context of the medical field and economic. How, for example, has impotence evolved from being technically uselessness and meaninglessness before to something that can be remedied by the science of medicine today? Having no children before yields into an immediate notion of non-productivity, but today one may think otherwise. Yet, one of the many implications of this deployment that is not necessarily given that as much attention as compared to medicine is sex differences, the very indicator of procreativity. Cook, in her work *The Personality and Procreative Behavior of Trial Judges*, attempted to look into sex as an emerging concept in the sphere of political

participation, approaches, and socialization of men and women trial judges. For example, women trial judges' decision on what political arena they would immerse themselves into is affected by socio-cultural factors like obligations at home or with children. Men judges, on the other hand, have a higher rate of participation in the political sphere, not only because of less pressure in terms of the constraints of household and domestic obligations, but also of less structured functions (i. e., as compared to women's political role being translated from their " home-making role," men judges have definite and straight-to-the-point objectives in the realm of politics)