

The History of Sexuality: An Introduction Study Guide

**The History of Sexuality: An Introduction by Michel
Foucault**

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Plot Summary

The text, authored in French, is intended to serve as an introductory primer to a larger series of works which thoroughly treat the history of sexuality in Western cultures. Excepting its role as an introductory primer, the volume does stand alone as an interesting introduction to the topic, written in dense collegiate-level prose. As an introduction, therefore, the text focuses on limited primary tasks: refuting the notion that sexuality is repressed in Western culture; defining sexuality and its extents and corollaries; and establishing sexuality as a component within a historical framework.

Part 1 of the text serves as a concise statement of purpose and an outline of the remainder of the work. It offers a very brief overview of sexual custom throughout the past several hundred years and mentions significant events in the development of sexuality. Part 1 poses three specific questions as types of theses; the questions are answered in the subsequent sections of the text.

Part 2 of the text is composed of two chapters, each of which answers one of the questions presented in Part 1. Part 2, Chapter 1, considers the incitement to discourse (the constant urge to talk about sex) prevalent in our society. It examines the various mechanisms which have evolved which incite discussion and foster constant sex talk about a variety of sexual practices. Part 2, Chapter 2, considers the most-recently developed main branch of sexuality, perversion. Various perverted sexual activities are briefly discussed, but the chapter deals predominantly with the historical process whereby perversion was specified and codified into its present form.

Part 3 concludes the introductory nature of the volume by examining the history of the scientific approach to sex. Four primary methods of scientific investigation are proposed - the hysterization of women's bodies, the pedagogization of children's sexuality; the socialization of procreation; and the psychiatrization of perversion. Each of these modes subsumes certain types of sexuality, and each promotes a distinct base of power, which derives its energy from the specific sexuality defined. Part 3 concludes by responding to the initial three theses of Part 1 and convincingly concludes that sexuality is not repressed; in fact, sexuality is the principle focus of our modern society.

Part 4 marks a distinct shift in the text; instead of primarily consisting of an introduction to sexuality, Part 4 serves as a critical introduction to the remaining volumes (not here summarized) of the series. Three relatively transparent chapters detail the objective, methodology, and area of investigation of the sphere of sexuality that will be utilized and pursued in latter volumes. A fourth chapter divides the history of sexuality into distinct phases or historical periods.

Part 5 of the text serves to locate sexuality in a larger historical context of power structure development. Prior to sexuality our cultures were maintained by a power structure, which Foucault terms "alliance," fealty based on kin and political relationships. The gradual decline of this process is considered and the simultaneous rising of the power of sexuality is discussed. The principle rationale behind including this segment in

the introductory text seems to be a proper consideration of sexuality in a larger historical field.



Part 1, We "Other Victorians"

Part 1, We "Other Victorians" Summary and Analysis

During the 17th century, sexuality was not considered illicit and sexual acts were pursued more or less flagrantly. There was no taboo regarding sex, and even children were commonly aware of sexual behaviors. Then sexuality was gradually shifted into the home, where it became a personal matter between exclusive partners. Sexuality was controlled and manipulated to become productive and reproductive of national power. Thus, the repression of sexuality led to the concentration of power, whilst power became simultaneously equated to pleasure. Throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, sexuality became taboo, became socially non-existent, and the discourse of sexuality fell silent, even as populations continued to increase rapidly.

In contemporaneous times, Freud and other sexuality theorists eventually began to investigate the silent paradigm of sex but did so only with conventional and highly scientific, detached methods; Freud's language is controlled expertly. In the modern day, many argue that sexuality has been utterly repressed. Many argue that throwing off repression feels like empowerment. The discourse of repression has become nearly religious in its reliance on unquestioned basic principles.

The subsequent text will challenge the so-called repressive hypothesis by seeking to answer three pivotal questions. First, is the repression of sexuality a real historical fact or a modern creation retroactively imposed upon the past? Second, does the repression of sexuality really lead to a concentration of power? Third, is the analysis of the repression of sexuality in reality simply a constituent component of the repression itself?

Part 1 is the introductory statement of the text and describes the socially-accepted paradigm of sexuality and its generally recounted history. The text then briefly attempts to link the subjugation of sex to the concentration of political, or national, power; and, circularly, that of power back to pleasure. The contemporaneous practice of critically, but coolly, examining sexuality and the discourse of sexuality is then noted and concisely critiqued. Thus, the author and the readers become the so-called "other Victorians" in being unable willfully to escape the supposed historical repression of sexuality.

Part 1 then concludes with a summation of the primary line of inquiry of the remainder of the text - is the conventional understanding of repressed sexuality, as outlined, essentially correct, or is there another, more appropriate, way of examining sexuality? Three basic questions are addressed to the reader and form the basis of Parts Two and Three of the text. The topics considered in this section of the text are presented only briefly as is appropriate for an introduction; they will be treated with much more detail in subsequent sections.

The notion of "power" is also introduced in Part 1. A correct understanding of Foucault's notion of power is critical to a correct interpretation of the thesis of the text. It is a



curious fact that Foucault defers considering the definition of power until Part 4, Chapter 2 of the text. Likewise, the meaning of sexuality within the text is not perfectly aligned with the conventional definition and, once again, curiously, Foucault defers considering the definition of sexuality until Part 4, Chapter 3 of the text.



Part 2 , Chapter 1, The Incitement to Discourse

Part 2 , Chapter 1, The Incitement to Discourse Summary and Analysis

The language of sex and sexuality was codified and restricted from the 17th century onwards; simultaneously the discourse about sexuality constantly increased. For example, confessional manuals regarding sex became continually more linguistically vague, even as the sphere of perceived sexual sin increased in scope dramatically. Instead of only the sex act being sinful, even thinking of the sex act or just dwelling on sensual things gradually became sinful.

During the 18th century, the sexual discourse was fairly monolithic and presented generally in terms of sin; from the 18th century onward, however, sexual discourse gradually transforms into many discourses. This process resulted in the creation and popular consumption of so-called scandal books; fiction or even non-fictional accounts of illicit behaviors and tell-all disclosures. Respectable society refuted scandalous inference but still engaged in sexual discourse. For example, medical discourses on things sexual were typically prefaced by a disclaimer of the lurid and filthy details which followed. Government demographers walked a thin line between licit and illicit in their attempts to measure population yielded from sexual intercourse and link it to the concepts of national power. In particular, children's sexuality was controlled. Overtly denied it was tacitly and subversively acknowledged. Whole regimens of control were developed to ensure that children did not express their sexuality physically.

These processes resulted in the overt denial of sexuality, oddly coupled with the rapid proliferation of sexual discourses; thus various "nervous disorders" were described, "excesses" were discussed, and "frauds against procreation" were considered. Sexual behavior, always sinful, also became frequently criminal: "heinous" crimes and "crimes against humanity" were codified and enforced, and the whole scope of sexual crime increased in degree and seriousness.

Sexuality, therefore, transitioned from physical pleasure to pleasure through discourse. Although sex was constructed to be *the secret*, everyone spoke about it *ad infinitum*; sexuality was constructed not by "massive censorship but regulated and polymorphous incitement to discourse" (p. 34).

This chapter examines the process of the supposed repression of sexuality in some detail. The principle thesis presented is that the pleasure of sex is removed from the physical act and the sensual thought and transferred to the discourse of sexuality. Thus, participating in illicit sexual activity is sinful and also gradually becomes criminal. And, simultaneously, the scope of illicit behavior gradually expands until it consumes



everything except for pedestrian sex between married heterosexual couples engaging infrequently in attempts at procreation to increase the national status.

The response to this subjection of sexuality is a greatly increased tendency to talk about sexuality. Thus the discourse of sexuality increases in scope and detail proportionate to the supposed repression of physical sexuality. Instead of having sex, people talk about sex. The discourse of sex becomes more prevalent and more fragmented as it multiplies into various specialized discourses. Medical doctors diagnose sexual craving as nervous disorders or hysterical outbursts. Psychologists diagnose sexual thought as excesses; the clergy condemns onanism (coitus interruptus) as a fraud against procreation. Criminologists codify numerous behaviors with sexual bases and classify them as various types of crime - extra-marital intercourse becomes a heinous crime and homosexuality a crime against nature. Foucault presents the example of Jouy, a half-wit farmhand, who pays younger girls for manual sexual stimulation circa 1867 - in the 17th century, his behavior would not have been considered notable, but by 1867, he was taken away, and, though acquitted of criminal behavior, incarcerated in a hospital for careful observation for the remainder of his life. His case is exceptional because of the incredible range of investigation it entailed - legal, medical, and psychological - resulting in numerous scientific publications and discourse. Jouy's notorious misfortune, of course, resulted from the observed public purchase of masturbation, which he referred to as a game rather than as sexually-predatory behavior. Had Jouy purchased his manual stimulation from a brother - that is, from a sanctioned, and therefore controlled, source of illicit behavior - he would have finished his days as an anonymous half-wit farmhand.

The thesis is therefore developed convincingly that sexuality has not been so much entirely repressed as channeled through discourse. Instead of engaging in sexual behavior, people derive their sexual pleasure via discourse of sexual behavior; everyone considers sex to be repressed and secret, yet it is *the* secret which is constantly discussed in obscure terms by the sex-obsessed informed. Thus is caused the incitement to discourse.



Part 2, Chapter 2, The Perverse Implantation

Part 2, Chapter 2, The Perverse Implantation Summary and Analysis

Through the end of the 18th century, the practices of sex were governed by the tripartite alliance of canonical law, the Christian pastoral, and civil law. During this period, the focus of sexual control was the married, heterosexual couple, which was largely officially presumed to be the sole seat of sexual unions. The burden of 18th century law placed upon the married couple was considerable and extensive. From the end of the 18th to the 19th century, however, there was a gradual evolution away from the spousal bed - married couples were left more and more alone as they were presumed to be pursuing legitimate, or regular, sexuality, which centered on procreation to assist the continued development of national power. Instead, other avenues of sexuality gained the attention of law and society. This shift in focus resulted in the continued exposure of various sexual perverses and their preferred modes of sexual expression. These peripheral sexualities were enumerated and dissected, categorized, criminalized, and discussed at great length in the medical, scientific, and popular literatures. Throughout the 18th century, various forms of criminal sexuality were often punished by the courts with standard legal impositions. During the 19th century, the trend was toward lesser penalties, and the judicial offices frequently deferred cases to medical investigation and pronouncement. Thus, sexuality became increasingly heterogeneous and riddled with various perversions implanted in the culturally-accepted form of regular sexuality.

The equating of power and pleasure, and of power and perversion, thus emerged along four principle modes. Simply prohibition or attempts at prohibition was not utilized. The first form of power derivation comes from an analysis of sexuality; discovering the root cause of sexual behavior; surveillance of those likely to practice the form of sexual expression, coupled with channeling and controlling that expression. This mode was principally used to attempt to extinguish child sexual tendencies. The second form of power derivation comes from the classification of perversions. In essence, the perverted act becomes the person; the person does not demonstrate a habit but their essential nature. Once classified, the pervert becomes subjected to criminal penalties and social control but is not eliminated from the system. A third mode of power derivation arises from medicalizable objects - alternate sexuality is observed as a medical condition, which is perhaps treatable but is definitely analyzable. Sexual pleasure is derived from the medical observation of perverted activities, and sexual pleasure is thereby magnified between the observer and the observed. Thus, the questioner and the responder in a medical paradigm of perverse sexuality engage in a sort of sexual pleasure game. The fourth and final mode of power derivation results from the fragmentation and analysis of sexuality, which leads to inciting and ever multiplying mechanisms of cultural sexuality. This is a self-informing spiral.



Power and sexuality support each other and overlap; they mutually benefit from the other structure. Power is derived from sexuality through several modes, and sexuality is magnified and multiplied by the focus of power. Thus, the repression hypothesis can be abandoned, as it is clear that power structures do not seek simply to repress sexuality (because they cannot derive power from simply repression), but, instead, power structures seek to amorously manage sexuality. This spiraling process results in increased attention to sexuality, an attention which is purposefully manifested and constantly verbalized.

This chapter analyzes the relationship between power and sexuality and investigates the second thesis considered in Part 1 - does power arise through the repression of sexuality? The obvious conclusion is no; power is derived through the management and marginal control of sexuality, not through simple repression. Coupled with Chapter 1, this discussion effectively eliminates the repression hypothesis and is thus a major development in the text's thesis. Part 3 will examine the process of discourse generation in a specific area, and the remainder of the primer will examine an alternative hypothesis of the development of sexuality and why it is usually perceived to have been deliberately repressed.

The alternate to repression is termed an implantation; perversion was seized upon as a mode of power extraction, and, thus, sexuality was splintered into numerous alternative methods, nearly all labeled perversions. Once codified and defined, perversions were regulated by criminal law, denigrated by the Christian pastoral, and subjugated by civil law. All these bases of power thus derived an increased influence through the 19th century explosion of newly-created perversity. Had sexuality simply been actually repressed, the power-pleasure spiral would not have been created. One of the more intriguing paragraphs of the chapter enumerates several bizarre and obscure perversions; the deliberately vague appellations given to supposedly precise medico-psychological conditions are astounding and ridiculous.

The chapter concludes with an enumeration of four principle modes by which power is derived from sexuality. Each mode is developed as a somewhat distinct methodology, which applies to a specific type of sexuality. Missing from the list is the previously described method of nation-state building by the social control of routine sex between married couples, aimed, presumably, at procreation. These four hypotheses are not mutually exclusive - indeed they support each other and often serve to magnify each other. Although they are not fully developed in the remainder of the text, they are presented in sufficient detail for the purposes of an introduction.



Part 3, *Scientia Sexualis*

Part 3, *Scientia Sexualis* Summary and Analysis

Various sex societies around the world focus on the *ars erotica*; in the erotic arts, pleasure is its own justification and the truth of sex is derived from pleasurable acts. The truth of sexual pleasure remains unanalyzed and secret because public analysis would destroy the physical pleasure and invalidate the experience. In these societies, acknowledged masters teach initiates sexual practice. In the Western cultures, the erotic arts have been replaced by *scientia sexualis*, or the science of sexuality.

The science of sex involves the rigid codification of pleasure and the source of sexual pleasure and utilizes methods of interrogation and inquest first derived from the Christian confessional. Thus, the pleasure of sex is found in the solicitation and discursive repetition of sexual sin. Western literature embodies this principle in the confessional novel, and the practice of the confession became increasingly central to the Western experience.

The confessional process, however, was originally ephemeral and existed only between the subject and the confessor. Eventually medical doctors and psychological investigators began to act as confessors and began to record their subjects' confessions. Thus the processes of confessional science originate with the voluntary admission to the practice of unmentionable acts. Science extorted sexual confession through five principle avenues. First, clinical codification required a complete confession of practice coupled with an examination of physicality. Second, a postulate of general and diffuse causality of sexual deviancy equated sexuality to everything about one's existence - thus, a diagnosis of sex required a complete confession. Third, the ways of sex were recognized as obscure and, thus, require a comprehensive confessional investigation. Often, sexual secrets are hidden even to the subject and must therefore be rigorously extracted through confessional analyses. Fourth, sexual paradigms were recognized to be complex and thus the truth was beyond the capability of interpretation of the average individual. Medical experts were needed to assimilate, interpret, and recode sexuality. Fifth, and finally, is the social promise that medicine actually heals ailments. Thus, the medicalization of perversion suggests that a normalization of sexuality is possible.

The history of 19th century sexuality is thus seen to be a history of discourses. The theory of repression of sexuality can be dispensed with as historically inaccurate; instead, the West produced a system of producing true discourse about sexuality. *Scientia sexualis* functions as a Western *ars erotica*. It is interesting to wonder if this correlation is an unanticipated by-product of the process or a subtle evolution of it.

Part 3 considers the appearance and development of the *scientia sexualis*, or the medico-pathological codification of sexuality prevalent in Western culture. Foucault proposes that this scientific process has replaced the erotic arts practiced in Eastern



culture and has largely divorced the pleasures of sex from the sexual act itself; instead, truth and pleasure are found in the analysis of the act. This is often misunderstood as a historic attempt to repress sexuality; in fact, far from repression, it has made sexuality the central focus of Western culture and spawned a multiplicity of discourses about deviant and perverse sexualities as well as a heterogeneity of discourses about so-judged normal sexualities. Part 3, in conjunction with Part 2, thus conclude the initial three theses of the text, and the remainder of the text is devoted to an alternative interpretation of the implementation and deployment of sexuality in Western cultures.

Throughout Part 3, Foucault refers obliquely to a score of various sex researchers and medical doctors. Many of the individuals are fairly obscure but many of them remain, even today, widely read and referenced. These founders of the science of sexuality are apparently admired by Foucault, who is, after all, also investigating the science of sex. Unfortunately, biographical information is not presented for a majority of the researchers. It is an interesting and noted paradigm that these initial researchers are today simultaneously considered somewhat napve but also frequently cited as general authorities of the subjects of alternate sexualities and perverse behaviors.

Most of Part 3 is consists of a discussion of the development of sexual confession from the earliest Christian confessionals to the modern practice of psychoanalysis, which presumably extracts sexual secrets hidden from everyone, including the possessor. The process in any of its guises or by any name is a form of medico-sexual confession; sexuality is assumed to be pervasive and claimed to circumscribe personality definitively - thus, only a complete, often painful, confession, coupled with a professional analysis, can restore normal pathology, or so we are told. Even as he proposes and exposes the paradigm, Foucault does not deny it. He concludes the section by humorously musing whether Western sexuality is a by-product of sexual science or sexual science is the subtle evolution of Eastern sexuality; perhaps both are possible.

Part 3 concludes the initial investigation into the three questions posed during the development of the text's thesis in Part 1: is sexual repression a historical fact? no; is power derived primarily from repression? no; is the discourse of repression a roadblock to power or a part of the thing it denounces? It is clearly a part of the thing it denounces and willfully is misrepresented as repression. As a primer or introduction to the history of sexuality, the remainder of the text is given over to the development of an alternative theory of the history of sexuality.



Part 4, ,Chapter 1, Objective

Part 4, ,Chapter 1, Objective Summary and Analysis

In Chapter 1, Foucault presents his objectives in discovering the history of sexuality. One objective is to analyze and validate the talking sex worn by Western society; a second is to understand the unceasing and simultaneously restrained and loquacious discourse of sexuality. Sexuality has not been, is not, repressed. Instead it is magnified, illuminated, and studied endlessly. In modern times it has largely been subjected to a particular form of exploitation through discourse, which has tied sexuality inextricably to power. Yet power's relation to sex is subtle; power is influenced only negatively, by laying down rules about sexuality. Power dictates law to sex and insists its own rules of prohibition be observed. One prohibition is on the acknowledgement of sexuality; thus "[r]enounce yourself or suffer the penalty of being suppressed; do not appear if you do not want to disappear. Your existence will be maintained only at the cost of your nullification. Power constrains sex only through a taboo that plays on the alternative between two nonexistences" (p. 84). Power demands censorship and the uniformity of the apparatus over all levels. Everyone is subjected to the power of sexuality; everyone is regulated and limited by the exercise of that power.

The existence and analysis of power structures is clearly not unique to sexuality; Foucault will borrow theory from other fields and incorporate ideas from elsewhere. Power is thus demonstrated to exist in somewhat circular terms of law; power is exercised in the form of law, and law is the form of power. This is apparently a foundational paradigm of Western culture and is not often challenged. The various monarchs and governments exercise power through the law; in turn, the law is the seat of their power even though the law, primarily, circumscribes and limits acceptable behavior. Similarly, power and sexuality are inextricably intertwined; power is exerted over sexuality by limiting, defining and codifying, while sexuality yields power through permissible conformance.

This chapter presents a fairly transparent statement of purpose; the text and its complementary volumes (not considered in this summary) propose to analyze the structures of sexuality and power. Just as torture and confession are termed evil twins, sexuality and power reinforce and support each other in an intertwined spiral; itself a sexual metaphor. The objective of the text is, therefore, to examine and understand the history of sexuality beyond the commonly held, and refuted, opinion that sexuality is simply repressed.

The intricacy presented by the chapter deals with the fundamental nature of power and seeks to explain, or at least to justify, the investigation of power as a corollary to sexuality. Their interplay is subtle and interesting; power asserts itself over sexuality by denying its existence; sexuality yields to power by self-effacement. The process is often mistaken for simple repression but it is far more complicated. Instead of repressing, the self-referential system increases power and magnifies sexuality. Sexuality thus

becomes the central seat of power, simultaneously existing in a sort of denied locus. It can only be discussed via a type of non-referent discourse, which is intentionally vague and obscure. It is interesting to note that Foucault devotes such attention to an apology couched as an objective; clearly he is playing with the notion of stating professionally-distant scientific interest in the topic and offering his own disclaimer of the presumably disturbing facts, which will presently be exposed. In this manner, the text becomes increasingly meta-textual and self-referential.



Part 4, Chapter 2, Method

Part 4, Chapter 2, Method Summary and Analysis

Power is the name given to a vast sociological construction full of numerous points of concentration that all vie constantly for supremacy. The various relationships between these points are a type of force and the aggregate of the forces forms power. Thus, power refers to a complex strategic situation within a particular society. Power is not acquired or seized but is an inherent element of any system - power is not exterior to the system and arises within the system itself. Power relations are both intentional and non-subjective. Wherever power exists, resistance also exists - the resistance itself is not exterior to the power but is inherent within the power and the system.

The basic methodology used in the subsequent investigation into the history of sexuality will thus be a focus on the most immediate and local power relations present within the construct of sexuality; that is, an investigation of how sexuality yields power and how power influences sexuality. Power is wielded as a form of knowledge, but the relationship is not static but consists rather of transformational matrices. Power must simultaneously be understood on two levels; the tactical and the strategic. The two levels cannot be understood separately from each other. For example, the family does not duplicate society, but the family supports society; society does not duplicate the family, but society shapes and defines the family. Power and knowledge are joined together via the vehicle of discourse. Discourses are tactical blocks operating within society - that is, they are points of power. Thus, discourses are realizations of power; discourses of sexuality are realizations of sexuality's power. The goal of investigating the history of sexuality must be to discover how the current paradigm arose.

This chapter formulates four parallel methodologies which will be used to investigate the history of sexuality. Foucault humorously notes that the methodologies are not rules, but guidelines, which will usually, but not always, be followed. The method of the text is therefore to examine and understand sexuality by an examination of the interplay between sexuality and power structures.

The intricacy presented by the chapter deals with the definition of power. It is curious that Foucault chose to delay the definition of "power" until nearly two-thirds of the way through the text, as the theme of power is central to the thesis. Likewise, in Part 4, Chapter 3, Foucault will examine the internal definition of "sexuality," which is not particularly synonymous with the conventional definition. These late-term definitions serve well enough for the entire series but may require some rethinking of earlier parts of the current text.

For Foucault, power is inherent in any social system and is inextricably linked to resistance. Thus, sexuality is conceived as a system with numerous disparate elements that all struggle for supremacy. No single element is ever totally supreme because its position is meaningful only when considered in relation to other elements. This



conglomeration of elements results in a multiplicity of forces, as each element struggles against all other elements. The aggregate forces taken as a whole are the power of the system. Since power is exerted against all elements simultaneously, it is inevitable that power results in resistance. For Foucault, all these components are inseparable and can only be made intelligible if taken as a whole unit of activity.



Part 4, Chapter 3, Domain

Part 4, Chapter 3, Domain Summary and Analysis

Sexuality is the name given to a historical construct. It is not a biological reality; it is not reproduction, and it is not the act of coitus. Sexuality is a great diffuse network including the stimulation of bodies, the intensification of pleasures, the incitement to discourses, the formation of special knowledge, and the strengthening of controls and resistances. Sexualities are diverse, and distinct sexualities struggle against other sexuality to attempt to attain supremacy, however transiently. Sexuality is tied to power and is rapidly expanding. It is not reproductive; rather it is an intensification of the body.

Modern sexuality consists of four principle branches based on four power centers. These historical processes of note are: the hysterization of women's bodies; the pedagogy of children's sex; the socialization of procreation, and the psychiatrization of perversion. Women have been viewed as saturated with sexuality to the point of pathology and, thus, are seen as needing medical assistance to regain normalcy. Children's sexual urges are natural, but unnatural, and must be discussed and controlled. The standard act of sex as a reproductive act must be encouraged and dogmatized. Perversions must be treated and normalcy restored. This fourfold structure results in four principle objects of desire: hysterical woman, masturbating child, Malthusian couple and perverse adult.

The historical development of sexuality created a base of power outside of the previously typical power structure created by Feudalism and filial inheritance. Sexuality becomes linked to this other power base through and within the family unit, which, thus, forms the basic unit of power. Sexual intercourse within the family, generically termed incest, is strictly forbidden as the universal rule of rules - and yet sexuality thrives within the family structure. This development is not without tension and conflict. The supposed solution for these tensions is to seek medical attention to restore normal functioning. Thus arose the modern practice of psychoanalysis with its deep-seated assumption that all sexuality arises within the family unit; we gain desire only through our parents.

This chapter explores the range of investigation, which properly is applicable to an inquiry of sexuality. Four principle loci of sexuality are enumerated and explained; these, in turn, give rise to four discrete objects of desire, namely: hysterical women (Foucault undoubtedly used hysterical in the 19th century sense); masturbating children; so-called "normal" reproductive heterosexuality; and that less-important, but vast, group of perversions. Since perversity was quickly codified and fragmented, perverse sexualities form small blocks within the power matrix and are therefore, individually, unable to exert substantive force over the other, larger, blocks - their great power is an aggregate capability which carries its own internal resistance.

Foucault proposes that prior to the advent of sexuality as the great social base of power, a system of family-based inheritance, somewhat akin to Feudalism, and largely based



on kinship, was exercised. He terms this alternative process "the deployment of alliance" (p. 106) and compares it to the deployment of sexuality. As the significance of the system of alliance began to wane and the system of sexuality arose, there was obviously a struggle for supremacy. This struggle found its common center within the family unit. As families' power shifted from kinship to sexuality, sexuality became firmly rooted within the family structure. Incest, the taboo of the system of alliance, was inherited by the new system of sexuality. Yet again, the family was the seat of sexuality. This contradiction - exclusion of sex but inclusion of sexuality - yields tension within the family unit. The tension is seen as pathological, and, as expected, society turned to the field of medicine to restore normal function. Thus arose the great field of psychoanalysis, which attempts to ferret out all of the disguised sexual urges centered on incestuous desire and analyze them and, through confessional science, validate and expurgate those urges and, thereby, to adjust the individual to normal social life. Once again, the medicalization of sexuality comes to the rescue!



Part 4, Chapter 4, Periodization

Part 4, Chapter 4, Periodization Summary and Analysis

The history of sexuality is not a monolithic history of directed change. Rather, notable events have marked large changes in sexuality, and sexuality can be quite different from century to century.

From the 16th to the 17th century, sexuality was principally viewed as the domain of Christian sin, and the discourse of sexuality was largely limited to the marital state. The Reformation saw the original rise of sexual controls within the church and established the gradual rise of the confessional as primarily a sexual discourse. This period of sexuality underwent a fairly radical change near the end of the 18th century when medicine, pedagogy, and economics directed sexuality to the control of the state as a means of national power. The shift from ecclesiastical to governmental dominance demonstrates notable continuity but is nevertheless a marked transformation. By the beginning of the 19th century, medicine had established a "normal" pattern for heterosexuality focused on reproductive processes within the family. Medicine had established three primary modes of sexuality: masturbating children, hysterical women, and normal procreation. Thus, sexuality had changed from a matter of death and sin to a matter of life and illness. In the middle of the 19th century, investigators introduced perversion as a fourth mode of sexuality, while, simultaneously, normal procreation became closely allied with so-called biological responsibilities to the race. Throughout the late 19th century, the medicine of sexual perversion became intertwined with programs of eugenics and gave rise to the technology of sex--the deeply held theory that perversion, though heredity, led inevitably to degenerate progeny. Programs of eugenics therefore focused on "cleansing" the race of perversions and degeneracy. This process was interrupted by psychiatry. Freud's psychoanalysis method broke the heredity link and established perversion as a sort of mental disorder, which was not necessarily hereditary. Psychoanalysis would have profound influence on future sexuality.

Sexual discourse first arose in the upper classes among affluent families. Modes of sexuality did not begin to penetrate the working classes until the end of the 19th century. It is therefore untenable to view sexuality as a repressive methodology aimed at subjugating a lower class. Instead, sexuality is correctly viewed as a self-affirmation of the upper classes, which only slowly was exported to other classes. This is understood in terms of class struggle; the upper classes focused on their ability to produce future leaders and maintain their class distinction. Thus, while the lower classes continued to flagrantly reproduce through sex, the upper classes began to restrict access to sex and replace the physical sex act with discourses of sexuality in an attempt to ensure a purity of class and race. Once psychoanalysis had, for the most part, unlinked perversions and sexuality from inheritance, sexuality slowly began to

diffuse into the working classes. This process once again argues that the repression metaphor is invalid - repressive structures are engendered by one class and foisted upon another class as a mechanism of control. Here, the sexuality discourse was originated and implemented upon the upper class, which invalidates a traditional interpretation of simple repression.



Part 5, Right of Death and Power Over Life

Part 5, Right of Death and Power Over Life Summary and Analysis

From Roman times, sovereigns have wielded the power of death. For example, they can cause one to expose his life in warfare and can even order execution within the law, however so defined. During the 18th century, this power of death gradually transformed into the power of life; that is, instead of a cautionary threat of death, the political power was seen as responsible to foster and improve living conditions. The power was simultaneously transferred from a sovereign to the state.

This power of life becoming transcendent over the power of death has its roots in 17th century, where two concepts informed social conceptions: body discipline was introduced via Christian morality; and social regulation arose as a complex component of the rising nation-state. As individual existence transformed from an uncertain day-to-day biological process to a modern, relative certainty of life expectancy, it was accompanied by the shocking social realization that, for purely political reasons, all life could potentially end nearly simultaneously due to technological advances.

The transformation from the power of death to the power of life resulted in an enormous void of power, which was unprecedented in Western cultures. Sex stepped into this void, and discourses of sexuality with their accompanying power structures quickly filled the gap. Sex was a good fit for several reasons; principally because its focus on the body and reproduction meshed exactly with body discipline and social regulation. Children and women were quickly controlled as the producers of the future generation. Somewhat later, perverts were controlled as alternative bases of power. Thus, society moved from a symbolics of blood to an analytics of sexuality; from optimism to sexuality.

Foucault then raises and considers several common points of contention regarding his theory of sexuality and power. This portion of Part 5, is interesting and contains specific objections followed by a discussion, which attempts to dismiss the contention; nevertheless, the points raised are not an integral component of the overall text.

In conclusion, sex gains paramount importance in society. Just as "love" was once considered worth dying for, sex is now worth death. Sex, itself, is desirable; sexuality enforces this idea. In the far future, sexuality will perhaps be viewed as amusing and strange - all of our vocal insistence that our primary focus is secret and forbidden and repressed, yet endlessly discussed. Freud didn't liberate us; rather, he continued the focus and proliferation of discourse.



Characters

Michel Foucault

Anonymous Author of My Secret Life

Jouy

Don Juan

**Pierre Garnier, Thysye Pouillet, Doctor Ladoucette,
and Maurice Rollinat**

**Joachim Heinrich Campe, Christian Gotthilf Salzmann,
Richard von Krafft-Ebing, Auguste Tardieu, Molle, and
Havelock Ellis**

Heinrich Kaan

Jean-Martin Charcot

Saint Alphonsus Liguori ("Alfonso de'Liguori")

**Marshal de Saxe, Jacques A.H. de Guibert, Joseph-
Michel-Antoine Servan**

**Franzois Quesnay, Moheau, and Johann Peter
S'ssmilch**

Sigmund Freud



Objects/Places

Sexuality

The text is principally concerned with the relationship between sexuality and power and with the history of sexuality. By "sexuality," Foucault does not mean sex or the physical experience of coitus; in fact, he often notes that sexuality is quite distinct from sex. Instead he defines sexuality as a purely historical construct that is difficult to easily understand - a network of the stimulation of bodies, the intensification of pleasures, and the incitement to discourse, which forms a special knowledge. Thus, sexuality varies by time and place. The specific textual concept of sexuality is integral to an understanding of the thesis but, strangely, Foucault does not explain the meaning of sexuality until Part 4, Chapter 3.

Power

The text is principally concerned with the relationship between sexuality and power. By "power," Foucault decidedly does not mean a traditional interpretation of hierarchical structures, where power flows from the top down, nor the bottom up. Instead he envisions a vast sociological construction full of numerous points of concentration that all vie constantly for supremacy. The various relationships between these points are a type of force, and the aggregate of the forces forms power. The specific textual concept of power is integral to an understanding of the thesis, but, strangely, Foucault does not elucidate the meaning of power until Part 4, Chapter 2.

My Secret Life

My Secret Life is the title of an autobiographic text written and published in the latter part of the 19th century by an anonymous, male author. The book was published in eleven parts and enjoyed huge popular success. It scrupulously details the erotic adventures of a libertine man, describing sexual acts, thoughts, and illicit behaviors in extremely minute detail. The text is presented in the form of a diary. Foucault points out that the scandal and dialogue surrounding the book epitomizes the Victorian habit of talking *ad infinitum* about supposedly secret and non-existent sexuality.

Criminal Sexuality

Various forms of human sexuality have been criminalized throughout the past several centuries. The first forms of criminal sexuality surrounded the presupposed sole seat of sex - the marital relationship. Laws divided the licit from the illicit and attempted to establish the marital obligation, the penalty for the inability to fulfill it, and the manner with which it was complied. During and after the 18th century, other forms of sexuality were criminalized including so-called debauchery (extramarital sexual relations), adultery, rape, sodomy, and others.



Sexual Perversion

Beginning in the 18th century and continuing until the present, various forms of sexual expression have been deliberately marginalized and labeled as perversions. Practitioners of these forms of sex are generally viewed as perverts. Their perversion is not understood so much as an action or series of actions as it is an expression of the individual's essential personality. Throughout the recent centuries, a wonderfully-complex and deliberately-obscure codification of perverts has been enumerated, including zoophiles, zoerasts, auto-monosexualists, mixoscopophiles, gynecomasts, presbyophiles, sexoesthetic inverts, dyspareunist women, and other equally exotically strange individuals.

Pitoy-Salpktriire Hospital ("Salpktriire")

Salpktriire is an asylum in France, which was originally constructed as a gunpowder manufactory, from whence it derives its unusual name. It has variously served as a prison and an asylum or both simultaneously. Throughout several centuries, it has housed prostitutes, the insane, and the criminally insane. Foucault refers to it as the epitome of medico-sexual investigations into pathology and a center for the origination of discourses of perverse sexuality.

Ars erotica

Ars erotica is the term Foucault uses to denote the erotic arts as practiced in several enumerated Eastern civilizations including China, Japan, India, Rome, and the Arabo-Moslem societies. In the *ars erotica*, truth is extracted from pleasure itself, and pleasure is derived from sexual activities. The truth gained is not subjected to analysis because doing so would invalidate the physicality of pleasure. These erotic arts are often taught to students by masters and are frequently codified but simultaneously remain beyond an active scientific analysis of causation.

Scientia sexualis

Scientia sexualis is the term used by Foucault to encompass the gradual, but nearly complete process, of the medicalization of sexuality through scientific observation. Its pervasive nature in Western civilization is comparable to the similar process of *ars erotica* in Eastern civilization.

The Confession

Foucault suggests that the Christian confessional was the original center of modern Western sexuality. The early codification of confession, penance, and forgiveness was firmly entrenched in Western culture and gradually evolved into a modern *scientia sexualis*, which is a form of super-confession. The subject is questioned and

interrogated and derives pleasure from having hidden truths thus extracted. The questioner gains pleasure from participating in the scientific confessional experience.

Les Bijoux Indescrets

Les Bijoux Indescrets was Denis Diderot's first novel, published 1748; the title is generally given in English as *The Indiscreet Jewels*. The novel is an extended allegory and portrays France's Louis XV as Prince Mangogul, a sultan who owns a magic ring that makes women's genitals talk. Foucault cites and very concisely summarizes Diderot's tale, noting that his objective in writing the text is to transcribe into history the fable presented in *Les Bijoux Indescrets*.



Themes

Sexuality

The text is primarily concerned with the relationship between sexuality and power and with developing the history of sexuality. By "sexuality," Foucault does not mean sex or the physical experience of coitus; he often notes that sexuality is quite distinct from sex. Instead he defines sexuality as a purely historical construct that is difficult to easily understand - a network of the stimulation of bodies, the intensification of pleasures, and the incitement to discourse which forms a special knowledge. Thus, sexuality varies by time and place. The specific textual concept of sexuality is integral to an understanding of the thesis but, strangely, Foucault does not elucidate the meaning of sexuality until Part 4, Chapter 3.

Sexuality as a system of cultural focus began to emerge in the 17th century and has continued as Western culture's principle focus through the modern day. Foucault argues that sexuality has its primary roots in the 17th century practice of Christian confession; a tradition that is carried on today as psychoanalysis. As the process of feudal and kin loyalty broke down with the advent of technology and world politics, sexuality was used to fill the power void. Sexuality was deployed into society along four principle divisions: the hysterization of women's bodies, the pedagogization of children's sexuality; the socialization of procreation; and the psychiatrization of perversion.

Each of these divisions of sexuality is a self-sustaining element with supporting theory, history, and base of power. Children's sexuality centers on the notion that masturbation is destructive to the individual and society and, if left unchecked, will ultimately destroy both. Thus, childhood masturbation is controlled by discourse and also by physical means. Women are the primary means of production for the nation-state's continued demography. Thus, women's sexuality must be focused on reproduction and heterosexual, child-rearing activities - other forms of feminine sexuality are deemed hysterical and pathological, requiring medical treatment. Similarly, heterosexual marriage focused on the creation of progeny is society's self-defined normal sexuality. Much later, various perverse sexualities were enumerated and defined.

Power

The text is primarily concerned with the relationship between sexuality and power. By "power," Foucault decidedly does not mean a traditional interpretation of hierarchical structures where power flows from the top down, nor the bottom up. Instead he envisions a vast sociological construction full of numerous points of concentration that all vie constantly for supremacy. The various relationships among these points are a type of force, and the aggregate of the forces forms power. The specific textual concept of power is integral to an understanding of the thesis, but, strangely, Foucault does not elucidate the meaning of power until Part 4, Chapter 2.



As sociological constructions, sexualities hold inherent power. At the breakdown of the kin and feudal power bases of society due to technological advances and global politics, a power void occurred. Sex was seized as the mechanism by which that void could be filled. Three initial sexualities were constructed as principle bases of power; children, women, and the married unit. All three of these initial sexualities focused on perceived matters of reproduction, which, outside of sexuality's power structures, fueled the political and economic power of the nation-state. By Foucault's definition, these three sexualities form discreet points within the space of sexuality and interact against one another along lines of force from whence is derived the power of sexuality.

Rather recently, a fourth primary mode of sexuality arose; that of perversions. During the mid 19th century, a whole host of perverted sexualities were enumerated and codified; taken as a group they replaced what had previously been termed sexual excesses or debaucheries. The initial perversion scrutinized was homosexuality; subsequent perversions are more extreme and composed of smaller numbers of practitioners. Each perversion acts as a discreet point within the space of sexuality and, therefore, although the numbers of any given type of perverts are relatively small, collectively they exert a notable influence on the scope of power within sexuality.

Myth of Repression

The conventional wisdom of Western culture is that sexuality has been repressed; we are not free openly to enjoy our sexuality and must constantly constrain our desires for sexual pleasure. Foucault's perception of sexuality and the inherent power derived of sexuality is fundamentally at odds with a system of sexuality, which is in fact repressed. The destruction of the myth of repression is therefore a critical component of his central theses. Thus, this introductory volume to a larger work on the history of sexuality spends a seemingly inordinate amount of effort dismantling the various logics that typically are used to apologize for a theorem of repression. As each argument for the repressive theorem is introduced, it is refuted by other evidence or by logic. Foucault makes a quite-convincing case that sexuality has not been repressed, but is in fact the central preoccupation of Western culture.

The initial segments of the text deal almost exclusively with a lengthy refutation of repression, and it is not until Part 4, roughly one-half way through the text, that Foucault begins to develop additional primary theses. Even as these additional theses are presented and discussed, frequent minor developments refer back to the initial refutation of the myth of repression.

In concise terms, Foucault argues that prior to the deployment of sexuality in modern culture, sex - the physical act - was largely public and usually practiced indiscreetly. Knowing children winked as adults copulated where they may and adultery was relatively common, marriage relatively less common than at present. The gradual breakdown of preexisting power structures left a void, which was filled with the deployment of sexuality. In order for sexuality to be mobilized as a significant power base, it was largely divorced from the sex act itself and became instead a system of

complex discourses. These discourses led society into a state of permanent excitement about sexuality and a tacit consensus that, although universally discussed, yet sexuality was the secret and the truth of society. Far from being repressed, argues Foucault, our sexuality is the central preoccupation of our lives, our society, and our culture.

Style

Perspective

Michel Foucault, b. 1926 d, 1984, was a renowned lecturer and theorist throughout the world. Foucault was the director at the Institut Franzais in Hamburg and the Institut de Philosophie at the Faculty des Lettres at the University of Clermont-Ferrand, and held a chair at the prestigious Collige de France. Foucault published numerous articles and books on a wide variety of topics. Foucault's complete *The History of Sexuality* was published in several individual volumes beginning with volume 1, the subject of this summary.

The text's intended audience is broad and not limited by subject; however, the linguistic presentation of concepts is incredibly difficult, and the language is dense and difficult to penetrate. This is partially due to the subtle and complex topics which are constantly self-referential, partly due to an English translation of rigorously difficult French, and partly due to the author's inherent bias toward a collegiate style of topic presentation. Instead of using words whose meanings are vague, the author redefines words to suit his purposes in an attempt to eradicate, so far as this is possible, slippage in meaning. This is coupled with the expectation that readers will exert the effort to comprehend the subject and an expectation that readers are either already conversant with numerous related external topics or, at the least, are willing to pursue extensive extra-textual reading. For example, Foucault frequently presents lists of additional, frequently obscure, authors with brief notes of their collective contributions. In particular, Foucault assumes the reader to be routinely familiar with Freud's theory of psychoanalysis.

Tone

The tone of the work is objective and detached. The author is very self-effacing and removes himself from the material except for the obvious admission of authorial intent and apology. Foucault obviously enjoys the interplay of language and the way it reflects on sexuality; he is clearly aware that his critique of the deployment of sexuality includes his current textual discourse, which is therefore largely meta-textually self-referential. Much of this playful enjoyment of theory is obfuscated by translation but enough remains to be easily perceived, which somewhat lightens the mood of the weighty material. Foucault is also the master theorist intent upon prosecuting his thesis to a maximally successful conclusion and does not shy away from difficult or taboo subjects or events. For example, he characteristically declaims the treatment of Jouy (refer to Part 1, Chapter 1) as ridiculously overblown given the facts.

The text's language is precise and difficult and the construction of sentences is often tortuous but additionally careful. Larger textual units, paragraphs and chapters, are much more conventional and accessible. The text clearly is written as an introduction and, therefore, is compact and highly summarized. External references are common but



exceptionally brief, and excessive information does not occur. Foucault states his opinion, briefly offers supporting evidence and moves on to the next topic. This brevity is appropriate but at times makes for difficult or frustrating reading.

The tone of the text inescapably informs the reader that the material is intended to be authoritative and complete, if complex. Although the title might infer a titillating sexual foray upon a casual perusal, any such misunderstanding is dispelled immediately from the first paragraphs. The text is intended to be taken seriously, and the density of the prose demands such an approach.

Structure

The 168-page text, originally published as *La Volenty de savoir* and later titled *Histoire de la sexuality*, is divided into five enumerated and named parts; two of the named parts are further divided into enumerated and named chapters. Part 2 includes two chapters, and Part 4 includes four chapters. The text also includes an index. The text is the first volume in a multi-volume series considering the history of sexuality (other volumes are not considered in this summary). The text is translated from the original French by Robert Hurley. There are several English-language translations available, and, thus, page numbers and English-language quotes may vary depending upon the translated source utilized. It is interesting to note that in this edition, occasional words are retained in the original French, within parentheses, following their translation. This presumably indicates a richness of terminology, possibly including multiple subtle meanings, which has escaped the translation. Of course any reader capable of extracting such sublime meaning from solitary French words would, needless to say, have no need of the English-language rendition.

The text is organized in a very straightforward thesis-like manner. The introductory section presents the scope of the investigation and proceeds to ask three primary questions as well as present an overall topic of the history of sexuality. The subsequent three segments of text address, in turn, the initial questions and provide internally-consistent answers. The text then turns to an exposition of the objectives, methods, and scope of the remaining lengthy investigation. The text concludes with a segment, which places the history of sexuality in a broad socio-historical context. The text's organization and presentation makes this difficult topic more accessible and is a highly suitable format.



Quotes

"For a long time, the story goes, we supported a Victorian regime, and we continue to be dominated by it even today. Thus the image of the imperial prude is emblazoned on our restrained, mute, and hypocritical sexuality. "At the beginning of the seventeenth century a certain frankness was still common, it would seem. Sexual practices had little need of secrecy; words were said without undue reticence, and things were done without too much concealment; one had a tolerant familiarity with the illicit. Codes regulating the coarse, the obscene, and the indecent were quite lax compared to those of the nineteenth century. It was a time of direct gestures, shameless discourse, and open transgressions, when anatomies were shown and intermingled at will, and knowing children hung about amid the laughter of adults: it was a period when bodies 'made a display of themselves.'

"But twilight soon fell upon this bright day, followed by the monotonous nights of the Victorian bourgeoisie. Sexuality was carefully confined; it moved into the home. The conjugal family took custody of it and absorbed it into the serious function of reproduction. On the subject of sex, silence became the rule." (Part 1, p. 3)

"Of course, it had long been asserted that a country had to be populated if it hoped to be rich and powerful; but this was the first time that a society had affirmed, in a constant way, that its future and its fortune were tied not only to the number and the uprightness of its citizens, to their marriage rules and family organizations, but to the manner in which each individual made use of his sex. Things went from ritual lamenting over the unfruitful debauchery of the rich, bachelors, and libertines to a discourse in which the sexual conduct of the population was taken both as an object of analysis and as a target of intervention; there was a progression from the crudely populationist arguments of the mercantilist epoch to the much more subtle and calculated attempts at regulation that tended to favor or discourage - according to the objectives and exigencies of the moment - an increasing birthrate." (Part 2, Chapter 1, p. 26)

"Although not without delay and equivocation, the natural laws of matrimony and the immanent rules of sexuality began to be recorded on two separate registers. There emerged a world of perversion which partook of that of legal or moral infraction, yet was not simply a variety of the latter. An entire sub-race was born, different - despite certain kinship ties - from the libertines of the past. From the end of the eighteenth century to our own, they circulated through the pores of society; they were always hounded, but not always by laws; were often locked up, but not always in prison; were sick perhaps, but scandalous, dangerous victims, prey to a strange evil that also bore the name of vice and sometimes crime. They were children beyond their servants and educators, cruel or maniacal husbands, solitary collectors, ramblers with bizarre impulses; they haunted the houses of correction, the penal colonies, the tribunals, and the asylums; they carried their infamy to the doctors and their sickness to the judges. This was the numberless family of perverts who were on friendly terms with delinquents and akin to madmen. In the course of the century they successively bore the stamp of



'moral folly,' 'genital neurosis,' 'aberration of the genetic instinct,' 'degenerescence,' or 'physical imbalance.'" (Part 2, Chapter 2, p. 40)

"1Cf., for example, Dysiry Bourneville, *Iconographie photographique de la Salpktriire* (1878-1881), pp. 110 ff. The unpublished documents dealing with the lessons of Charcot, which can still be found at the Salpktriire, are again more explicit on this point than the published texts. The interplay of incitement and elision is clearly evident in them. A handwritten note gives an account of the session of November 25, 1877. The subject exhibits hysterical spasms; Charcot suspends an attack by placing first his hand, then the end of a baton, on the woman's ovaries. He withdraws the baton, and there is a fresh attack, which he accelerates by administering inhalations of amyl nitrate. The afflicted woman then cries out for the sex-baton in words that are devoid of any metaphor: 'G. is taken away and her delirium continues.'" (Part 3, p. 56, footnote)

"The most important elements of an erotic art linked to our knowledge about sexuality are not to be sought in the ideal, promised to us by medicine, of a healthy sexuality, nor in the humanist dream of a complete and flourishing sexuality, and certainly not in the lyricism of orgasm and the good feelings of bio-energy (these are but aspects of its normalizing utilization), but in this multiplication and intensification of pleasures connected to the production of the truth about sex. The learned volumes, written and read; the consultations and examinations; the anguish of answering questions and the delights of having one's words interpreted; all the stories told to oneself and to others, so much curiosity, so many confidences offered in the face of scandal, sustained - but not without trembling a little - by the obligation of truth; the profusion of secret fantasies and the dearly paid right to whisper them to whoever is able to hear them; in short, the formidable 'pleasure of analysis' (in the widest sense of the latter term) which the West has cleverly been fostering for several centuries: all this constitutes something like the errant fragments of an erotic art that is secretly transmitted by confession and the science of sex. Must we conclude that our *scientia sexualis* is but an extraordinarily subtle form of *ars erotica*, and that it is the Western, sublimated version of that seemingly lost tradition? Or must we suppose that all these pleasures are only the by-products of a sexual science, a bonus that compensates for its many stresses and strains?" (Part 3, pp. 71-72)

"Another type of criticism of political institutions appeared in the nineteenth century, a much more radical criticism in that it was concerned to show not only that real power escaped the rules of jurisprudence, but that the legal system itself was merely a way of exerting violence, of appropriating that violence for the benefit of the few, and of exploiting the dissymmetries and injustices of domination under cover of general law. But this critique of law is still carried out on the assumption that, ideally and by nature, power must be exercised in accordance with a fundamental lawfulness." (Part 4, Chapter 1, p. 88)

"Power's condition of possibility, or in any case the viewpoint which permits one to understand its exercise, even its more 'peripheral' effects, and which also makes it possible to use its mechanisms as a grid of intelligibility of the social order, must not be sought in the primary existence of a central point, in a unique source of sovereignty



from which secondary and descendent forms would emanate; it is the moving substrate of force relations which, by virtue of their inequality, constantly engender states of power, but the latter are always local and unstable. The omnipresence of power: not because it has the privilege of consolidating everything under its invincible unity, but because it is produced from one moment to the next, at every point, or rather in every relation from one point to another. Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere. And 'Power,' insofar as it is permanent, repetitious, inert, and self-reproducing, is simply the over-all effect that emerges from all these mobilities, the concatenation that rests on each of them and seeks in turn to arrest their movement. One needs to be nominalistic, no doubt: power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society." (Part 4, Chapter 2, pp. 92-93)

"Consider for example the history of what was once 'the' great sin against nature. The extreme discretion of the texts dealing with sodomy - that utterly confused category - and the nearly universal reticence in talking about it made possible a twofold operation: on the one hand, there was an extreme severity (punishment by fire was meted out well into the eighteenth century, without there being any substantial protest expressed before the middle of the century), and on the other hand, a tolerance that must have been widespread (which one can deduce indirectly from the infrequency of judicial sentences, and which one glimpses more directly through certain statements concerning societies of men that were thought to exist in the army or in the courts). There is no question that the appearance in nineteenth-century psychiatry, jurisprudence, and literature of a whole series of discourses on the species and subspecies of homosexuality, inversion, pederasty, and 'psychic hermaphroditism' made possible a strong advance of social controls into this area of 'perversity'; but it also made possible the formation of a 'reverse' discourse: homosexuality began to speak in its own behalf, to demand that its legitimacy or 'naturalness' be acknowledged, often in the same vocabulary, using the same categories by which it was medically disqualified. " (Part 4, Chapter 2, p. 101)

"1. *A hysterization of women's bodies*: a threefold process whereby the feminine body was analyzed - qualified and disqualified - as being thoroughly saturated with sexuality; whereby it was integrated into the sphere of medical practices, by reason of a pathology intrinsic to it; whereby, finally, it was placed in organic communication with the social body (whose regulated fecundity it was supposed to ensure), the family space (of which it had to be a substantial and functional element), and the life of children (which it produced and had to guarantee, by virtue of a biogenico-moral responsibility lasting through the entire period of the children's education): the Mother, with her negative image of 'nervous woman,' constituted the most visible form of this hysterization." (Part 4, Chapter 3, p. 104)

"The first phase corresponded to the need to form a 'labor force' (hence to avoid any useless 'expenditure,' any wasted energy, so that all forces were reduced to labor capacity alone) and to ensure its reproduction (conjugal, the regulated fabrication of children). The second phase corresponded to that epoch of *Spdtkapitalismus* in which



the exploitation of wage labor does not demand the same violent and physical constraints as in the nineteenth century, and where the politics of the body does not require the elision of sex or its restriction solely to the reproductive function; it relies instead on a multiple channeling into the controlled circuits of the economy - on what has been called a hyper-repressive desublimation." (Part 4, Chapter 3, p. 114)

"Sex is not that part of the body which the bourgeoisie was forced to disqualify or nullify in order to put those whom it dominated to work. It is that aspect of itself which troubled and preoccupied it more than any other, begged and obtained its attention, and which it cultivated with a mixture of fear, curiosity, delight, and excitement. The bourgeoisie made this element identical with its body, or at least subordinated the latter to the former by attributing to it a mysterious and undefined power; it staked its life and its death on sex by making it responsible for its future welfare; it placed its hopes for the future in sex by imagining it to have ineluctable effects on generations to come; it subordinated its soul to sex by conceiving of it as what constituted the soul's most secret and determinant part. Let us not picture the bourgeoisie symbolically castrating itself the better to refuse others the right to have a sex and make use of it as they please. This class must be seen rather as being occupied, from the mid-eighteenth century on, with creating its own sexuality and forming a specific body based on it, a 'class' body with its health, hygiene, descent, and race: the autosexualization of its body, the incarnation of sex in its body, the endogamy of sex and the body." (Part 4, Chapter 4, pp. 123-124)

"Whence the importance of the four great lines of attack along which the politics of sex advanced for two centuries. Each one was a way of combining disciplinary techniques with regulative methods. The first two rested on the requirements of regulation, on a whole thematic of the species, descent, and collective welfare, in order to obtain results at the level of discipline; the sexualization of children was accomplished in the form of a campaign for the health of the race (precocious sexuality was presented from the eighteenth century to the end of the nineteenth as an epidemic menace that risked compromising not only future health of adults but the future of the entire society and species); the hysterization of women, which involved a thorough medicalization of their bodies and their sex, was carried out in the name of the responsibility they owed to the health of their children, the solidity of the family institution, and the safeguarding of society. It was the reverse relationship that applied in the case of birth controls and the psychiatrization of perversions: here the intervention was regulatory in nature, but it had to rely on the demand for individual disciplines and constraints (*dressages*). Broadly speaking, at the juncture of the 'body' and the 'population,' sex became a crucial target of a power organized around the management of life rather than the menace of death." (Part 5, pp. 146-147)

"We are often reminded of the countless procedures which Christianity once employed to make us detest the body; but let us ponder all the ruses that were employed for centuries to make us love sex, to make the knowledge of it desirable and everything said about it precious. Let us consider the stratagems by which we were induced to apply all our skills to discovering its secrets, by which we were attached to the obligation to draw out its truth, and made guilty for having failed to recognize it for so long. These devices are what ought to make us wonder today. Moreover, we need to consider the



possibility that one day, perhaps, in a different economy of bodies and pleasures, people will no longer quite understand how the ruses of sexuality, and the power that sustains its organization, were able to subject us to that austere monarchy of sex, so that we became dedicated to the endless task of forcing its secret, of exacting the truest of confessions from a shadow.

"The irony of this deployment is in having us believe that our 'liberation' is in the balance." (Part 5, p. 159)



Topics for Discussion

Consider the nature of your personal sexuality. Would you consider yourself to be normal? Hysterical? Perverse? Why?

Did you ever masturbate as a child? Was this a habitual pastime? If so, do you think that it led to insoluble moral decay in your adult psyche?

Have you ever practiced a sexual act which you consider to be perverse? Discuss the alluring components of perverse sexuality. Why do you think so many people are so interested in discussing sexual perversion? Do you consider the appellation "pervert" to be pejorative?

Foucault briefly describes the scientific demonstrations of the treatment of hysterical women performed by Jean-Martin Charcot and notes that Charcot often treated women on the verge of a hysterical spasm by utilizing something called a sex-baton. Would you consider this practice to be medically valid? Would you consider it to be a sexual perversion? Is it possible that the practice was simultaneously medically valid and sexually perverse?

Have you ever been psychoanalyzed? Did the psychoanalysis focus on sexual cravings for your oppositely-gendered parent? What was the outcome of your psychoanalysis?

Historically, homosexuality was considered to be a perversion - the so-called "crime against nature." Today homosexuality is not so-widely considered perverse. What mechanisms of discourse have been utilized by defenders of homosexuality to "legitimize" the practice? Could these same mechanisms of discourse be utilized to "legitimize" other practices which are widely considered to be sexual perversions?

Does biological sex determine sexual gender? How do the two components of sex interrelate to each other?

Throughout previous centuries various sex acts have been criminalized. At some times homosexuality has been punishable by death, while at other times rape has been tacitly condoned. What features of the history of sexuality help to explain the amorphous evolution of criminal sexuality?

Foucault states that in Western culture sex is "something worth dying for". Would you die for sex? What does Foucault mean?

Discuss the process of translation used to convert the text from French to English. How might this pervert the meaning of sexuality as originally conceived? Do you think the translation carries the same cultural connotations as the original?

Has reading this book changed your perceptions of your own sexuality?

Do you think that heterosexual intercourse is a fundamental component of personal sexuality?