

## Book Review

Foucault, Psychology and the Analytics of Power  
 Derek Hook  
 Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan

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In this review I focus primarily upon the aspects of this text that pertain to an application of the work of Foucault to psychological practice, and in particular its utility for further developing modes of practice that are amendable to those working in the field of community psychology with its focus on respect for diversity. The book itself also provides extensive attention to applications of Foucault's work to the development of research methodologies for use within the discipline of psychology, and to the study of specific topics such as racism, paedophilia and the construction of gated communities. Some of these topics are addressed in a separate review published elsewhere (Riggs, 2008).

Throughout the early chapters of the book Hook provides a thorough explication of psychology's role in the promotion of disciplinarity, or more precisely subjectivisation: a process differentiated from subjectification (the production of intelligible normative subject positions within any given social context) by its emphasis upon the ways in which particular regimes of truth (such as psychology) encourage people to apply such normative subject positions to themselves. Certainly in regards to my own counselling work this made me think of the ways in which contemporary practice discourse surrounding 'patient rights' and 'confidentiality' may actually serve to perpetuate disciplinarity and subjectivisation through positioning those who seek psychological intervention as inhabiting particular subject positions that come with a range of attendant expectations that must be enacted or claimed by the individual.

Furthermore, it made me reflect upon how this increased (or at least differentially enacted) emphasis upon the subjectivisation of clients serves to shift attention away from those who *provide* services and their investments in the process of disciplinarity. These musings, directly derived from my reading of Hook's text, are closely related to community psychology's aim to move away from an emphasis in practice upon inadequacy or failure (an approach largely made possible through the aforementioned modes of practice that render clients the primary focus of intervention), and toward a focus on strengths and the location of individuals within social contexts that variously promote or negate individual wellbeing.

Hook's writing also consistently deconstructs the temporal flow of psychological knowledge claims, whereby rather than seeing supposedly empirical 'facts' about individuals (such as those produced through psychological testing) as leading to psychological knowledge, psychological knowledge is instead seen as leading to the construction of particular individuals. In other words, Hook outlines Foucault's directive for the ongoing interrogation of how psychological constructs serve to produce particular intelligible subject positions that are typically framed in the negative sense as a fundamental failure or inability to approximate certain social norms deemed as 'healthy'. In this regard, and whilst Hook spends considerable time elaborating Foucault's emphasis upon the fact

that networks of social power are not enacted by any singular sovereign subject, he also outlines how particular social contexts are constitutive of agents who are variously invested with power on the basis of social markers deemed more or less intelligible and thus more or less worthy. In this sense, Hook usefully emphasises a relational understanding of power, whereby not only are individuals positioned in a relationship to social norms variously enacted upon bodies through institutions such as psychology that privilege particular modes of being over others, but where the relationality of power makes possible resistances to hegemonic ways of being. Such an account of power is vitally important for a community psychology seeking not only to challenge the imposition of normative social forces onto the bodies of marginalised individuals, but also to recognise the incompleteness of normative power relations: they forever fail to truly encompass or exclude all modes of being, thus suggesting that social change is indeed possible.

In addition to examining the broad ways in which psychology as it is typically practiced is complicit with modes of disciplinarity in relation to the regulation of bodies and wellbeing, Hook also examines the spatial and micro-interactive instances where psychology functions to perpetuate particular modes of being. For example, and in relation to psychology's role in engendering 'confessional' modes of being, Hook outlines how the specific spaces produced within practice settings engender modes of relating that maintain the client-practitioner binary. Hook also examines how claims to 'non-judgmental' and 'non-moralising' practice may actually serve to further the project of disciplinary surveillance by eliciting 'confessions' from clients. Empirical research conducted by Hook and his colleagues would suggest that whilst these types of approaches may often be seen as ethical modes of engagement, they may nonetheless function to encourage subjectivisation on the part of

clients. Rethinking the ethics of psychological practice, as has long been the task of community psychology, must therefore involve constant examination of how practitioners represent themselves to clients as individuals themselves invested in particular outcomes and modes of being.

Finally, Hook outlines an application of Foucault's work on genealogy as a research method that I would suggest has important implications for practice. Hook suggests that rather than examining (or indeed constructing) linear trajectories or finite histories, genealogical work is about exploring the spectrum of discontinuities, shifts, and marginalised knowledges that produce a context for events. In regard to practice, this could involve looking at how a range of 'similar enough' events cohere to produce mental health outcomes that, if disaggregated, could produce quite a different picture for the client. Rather than being about identifying antecedents or causes, such an approach would instead be about locating a range of events that make possible a particular intelligible subject position, and how the role of clients in activating this subject position through subjectivisation may be renarrated and thus shifted.

Overall, and whilst the main focus of Hook's text may not be practice, it nonetheless provides a clear series of injunctions for applying Foucault's extensive (and historically shifting) body of work to understanding both psychology as a discipline, and the specific practices of psychology that may serve to contribute to marginalisation or which may ignore the diversity of experiences held by clients. By recognising these limitations and drawing upon the alternate histories rendered evident through genealogical work, it may be possible to continue the project of community psychology to develop modes of engagement that are not only strength focused, but which are able to skilfully

negotiate the multiple and often conflicting demands placed upon us all to function as intelligible subjects within a range of social contexts that typically promote certain subject positions as more 'healthy', acceptable, or deserving of sanction than others.

#### **Reference**

Riggs, D. W. (2008). Book review. *ACRAWSA e-journal*, 4. [www.ejournal.acrawsa.org.au](http://www.ejournal.acrawsa.org.au)