

A CRITICAL GAZE AT PSYCHOLOGY

Hook, D (2007) **Foucault, psychology and the analytics of power**. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan. ISBN-13 978-0-230-00819-9 hbk. Pages xii + 301.

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Foucault, psychology and the analytics of power provides a compelling critique of the established and taken for granted co-ordinates of modern psychology as a discipline and set of practices. It provides a much needed injection of criticality into a discipline and profession that has for far too long been complacent about its historically conservative origins, functions and effects, and which continues in the main to labour under the illusion that psychology is merely a discipline premised on humanistic forms of altruism in the search for “truth”. Written by Derek Hook, a prominent critical psychology scholar, this collection of essays begins with the promise of stripping away some of these illusory features of modern psychology. Not only does it deliver on this promise amply by highlighting psychology’s development as a socio-medical science alongside the evolution of relations of power from sovereignty, to humanistic reformism, to more insidious disciplinary forms of power, but spells out how psychology has come to epitomize certain technologies of self-regulation and a form of moral orthopaedics that in fact contributes to the development of a docile psychological subject. It then extends on this initial promise and examines the critical value of Foucault’s work in psychology and the social sciences more broadly today.

Hook is courageous, unapologetic and generally balanced in the manner in which he tackles Foucault’s thesis on the evolution of power and its relationship to psychology. Firstly, as a scholar embedded within psychology, he undertakes a reflexive critique of psychology’s development which is a foreboding task for most psychologists, as it challenges our assumptions and worldviews and tears at the very foundations of our discipline and profession. Secondly, Hook does not however blindly follow Foucault as an unquestioning disciple, but rather dares to challenge Foucault’s work in several instances and attempts to track new pathways for psychology despite his critique. Not only is this sort of enterprise likely to stir contradictions within oneself as a scholar of psychology, but it is equally likely to generate a degree of enmity from many within psychology who hold its traditions dear, as well as those who are purist Foucauldian adherents.

While the book is essentially a collection of six essays that Hook had previously published or collaborated with others on, its scope is remarkably broad insofar as it

covers aspects of Foucault's earlier and later works, together with aspects of theory and application. There are ample illustrations from South African society, making the book even more accessible and relevant to South African scholars in psychology in particular. This is even more pertinent, given that so few publications have been generated on Foucault and psychology in South Africa. Written in the same tradition as some of the work by Burman, Parker, Butchart and Rose, the fact that this book is a collection of essays is perhaps both its greatest strength and its greatest weakness. Because it is an amalgam of papers previously developed, tweaked and refined for this text, it does not always have the internal coherence from one chapter to the next and certainly does not have the same focus as, for example, Butchart's (1998) **Anatomy of power: European constructions of the African body** (Pretoria: UNISA Press) - although in fairness to Hook, this is acknowledged in the introduction. The chapters are also variable in terms of density and while those less familiar with Foucault will in all likelihood find the first two chapters quite engaging (especially those in psychology), the latter chapters require a greater degree of familiarity with some of Foucault's earlier and later writings. It is dense, but shows a sophisticated engagement with one of the 20th century's most influential writer's works. Hook may however have wanted to reflect on the fact that the written endeavour is in itself a social practice that is imbued with power, as the writing style often tends to be characterized by a dense re-examination and application of Foucault's original work that may be inaccessible to those who are less familiar with Foucault. That being said though, this is a solid piece of scholarship.

The first chapter focuses on a reflexive analysis of psychology's emergence as a socio-medical science in a historical period that was characterized by shifts from sovereign power, to humanistic reform, to disciplinary power. It tracks the manner in which psychology not only constituted a knowledge domain of the individual, but also simultaneously produced the psychological subject. Hook details the myriad of psychological practices that include the surveillance of therapy, psychotherapy as a confessional, discourses of normalization and control, and a range of other secretive and expert practices that all contribute to the individual's self-regulation. Scholars of psychology will find this a particularly useful read, even if it leaves them feeling somewhat uncomfortable. This chapter, while extensive in its illustrations, sometimes feels repetitive and the discussion boxes are not always clearly delineated from the rest of the text. However, Hook does challenge Foucault's notion that there is a psychological vacuum before disciplinary power induces the emergence of the psychological subject. Drawing on the work of Butler and Vygotsky, he asks the important question as to whether psychological subjectivity does not perhaps require some sort of psychological scaffold on which to imprint itself. This is a particularly important debate, and it would have been useful to see it taken further. However, the nature of the text does not unfortunately allow for the deepening of this argument and this is also evident in other areas of the book when he deals with the works of writers such as Fanon and Gilroy.

The second chapter focuses specifically on the analysis of power, and here Hook re-articulates much of what Foucault has written on the subject, but with an applied focus on South Africa. While he holds true to the position articulated by Foucault on power and resistance, power and agency, power and intentionality, and is careful to avoid grand theories of power, he is also more nuanced in his analysis and understanding of power in the context of repression. While noting that the repression-liberation binary

conceptualization of power is problematic from a Foucauldian perspective, he nevertheless notes the political value of tactically setting one understanding of power as a counter-point to another, with a useful illustration of the Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa. In general, the first two chapters offer an introductory basis for those less familiar with Foucault's work, and are of particular importance to psychology.

The third chapter looks specifically at discourse and its analysis, and here Hook takes issue with some of the work done by Parker, and Potter and Wetherell. In this chapter one does however start to get a sense of a more purist approach to Foucault's work, and Hook systematically unpacks discourse and its analysis from a Foucauldian perspective, versus the kinds of discourse analyses proposed and conducted by Parker, and Potter and Wetherell. This again is a well-crafted chapter, but it would have been useful to see a more generous approach to varied understandings of discourse and its analysis, as this field has undoubtedly developed in the years since Foucault first wrote in this area. Despite being a rigorous chapter, a less strident approach to discourse analysis would have been useful to see, as there is the risk that one may read into Hook's critique a dismissal of other understandings of discourse and forms of discourse analysis if it is not rooted squarely in the Foucauldian tradition and does not rest on the genealogical method.

The following two chapters are superb examples of the application of Foucault's work to understanding complex, yet everyday social problems in South Africa. The first focuses on the construction of psychological abnormality, with an emphasis on the emergence of the paedophilic subject. The chapter illustrates how such a construction evolved in the particular context of a racialised social formation and set of material conditions that determined such conditions of possibility. The second of these chapters explores how Foucault's work can be deployed as a means to analyse spatial utilization in gated communities, and speaks to the manner in which spatial social practices can not only reproduce prevailing discourses, but can also generate new discourses themselves. The value of these chapters lies in the application of Foucault's work as a "method" of analysis in psychology and the social sciences more broadly. It highlights how Foucault's "method" can expose a range of vectors of power that intersect with each other in the everyday minutiae of social milieus, and again provides an excellent illustration of how Foucault's body of work can be integrated into critical psychological and social research.

Finally, the book concludes with a chapter that attempts to integrate aspects of Foucault's work on governmentality, disciplinarity and the affective effects and positionings that are induced in contexts where systematised social asymmetries exist. In particular, Hook points to the need to understand the affective effects of institutionalised racism, suggesting that these affective effects require some scrutiny in and of themselves as an integral component of the ordering and regulation of subjects within such contexts. Of course, this affective focus provides a further interesting angle to consider the recalcitrance of systematised forms of domination such as racism, but alas, the chapter concludes all too soon. While one may agree or disagree with Hook's analysis in this book, it is certainly a text that can not be ignored. A must read for those interested in developing a critical psychology and for keeping it critical.