

The History of Sexuality Volume II: The Use of Pleasure

Michel Foucault's project is human freedom—"to what extent the effort to think one's own history can free thought from what it silently thinks, and so enable it to think differently" (9).

Throughout his works he is concerned with practices and histories of normalization, of power, of knowledge, and of thought. Why? In order to practice human freedom.

→How does *The Use of Pleasure* accomplish or move toward this goal?

Foucault seeks to analyze the formation of practices that inscribe power on the body, that limit human freedom in some way. Such practices are not codified or inscribed from above; rather such inscriptions and codes come into being through discourses that circulate through culture and society. Sexuality as a discursive construction is what Foucault is concerned with here.

Foucault deals with the current construction of sexuality as it emerged over the last two centuries, in *An Introduction*. In this volume, he looks even earlier to the Greeks, and how sexual conduct was an ethical concern for them. He begins to develop a "hermeneutics of the self," in this volume—how did a concern for the self develop, he wonders?

→What is the relationship between the self and sexuality? Between desire and the self? How is sex made an ethical domain?

We all know that Plato is famous for the soul/body binary—which was developed and furthered through later philosophers such as Aristotle and Descartes into the mind/body split.

→Why do you think Plato would gravitate toward such a binary? Is there anything in Foucault that can help us understand why Plato would gravitate toward such a binary?
physis/nomos and the universal vs. particular

→What view of the body emerges from this text?

In many ways, we can look at this text as explicitly about gender. Feminist theorists have critiqued Foucault for not attending to the female body, to women. However, Foucault's text concerns the construction of the male body, or masculinity (which is just as much as gendered construction).

→What does it mean to be a man in the Greek world?

We are fortunate to have an example for which we can apply Foucault's ideas—the Michael Jackson case. Since the Jackson case concerns the love of boys (and Jackson has publicly discussed his love of boys/children), what are we to make of this situation?

→First, if we assume the charges are true against Jackson, how would the Greeks see his actions?

→Second, how might we theorize Jackson's body modifications and lifestyles according to Foucault?

I have discussed and emailed to you Foucault's concepts of power, as he relates them in the first volume, and we have re-read them in Bordo.

→How might we apply those theories about power to Foucault's discussion of the Greeks?

Foucault is very careful not to pose a continuum between the Greek world and the Christian world. While we might see some similarities, the discourses on sexuality and their *deployment* were radically different. Deployment is the key term here.

→How do you see the Christian world's view of sexuality as different from the Greeks?

In "Feminism, Foucault, and the Politics of the Body," Bordo posits two Foucaults—one is interested in normalization and one is interested in resistance.

→Which seems more useful to you? How can both of them be useful?

→How can we extend Bordo's brief references of her cultural analyses (of anorexia, etc)?

→Provide us with a brief sentence or two from your reading note that you feel encapsulates a major point or issue in your reading of the text.