

ABSTRACT

The following work, the thesis entitled “Flawed Bodies: A Study of Gender Performances, Subversions, and Formation of Sexual Identities”, proposes a theoretical enquiry into the discursive nature of body, sexuality, gendered performativity, and identity to develop an idea of flaw or deviation within the physicality of the body and the mechanism of discourse that allows the flawed body to create an intervention that challenges the regulatory mechanism of hegemonic discourses. This work uses Judith Butler’s theoretical concept of the performative nature of doing one’s gender, and Michel Foucault’s conception of the emergence of dislocatory and discordant events that challenge the existing hegemonic power in his analysis of discourse, to put forward the idea of the flawed body that is not entirely determined by the regulatory mechanism of power, and thus, maintains the possibility of creating inconsistency within power relations in order to pose a challenge to the generative power structures.

Foucault has provided, through his meticulous analysis of the exclusionary politics deployed in specific historical periods to explore the interrelations between power, knowledge, and subject, an indispensable theoretical methodology that informs much of recent discussions about gender and sexuality. He anticipates the possibility of a particular event in a genealogical enquiry that exceeds its causes and reverses the relationship of forces, so that the divergent event can appropriate the condemnations against it for its variance to eventually turn them against the powers that constitute the very possibility of the event. This discordant emergence of the event allows for the possibility of a reverse discourse that threatens the structure of existing hegemonic power. Judith Butler has explored, through her critical works on sex, gender, and performativity, how gendered identity is socially produced through repetition of ordinary daily activities, and her works have opened up newer possibilities for gender studies that questions the exclusionary gender norms that produce the normative portrayals of socially

and culturally acceptable gendered identities. Butler conceives of gender performativity as the enactment of a set of acts that creates one's gender; some of these acts are deviations of the culturally and socially assigned scripts that mark them as subversive acts that spill over and overflow the pre-assigned gender roles, unsettling and confusing the hegemonic domination through their capacity to disrupt and disorganise the existing repressive norms and regulations in order to reconfigure the relationships of forces. Engaging with these two theoretical conceptions, this study envisions the decisive manifestations of particular events of those subversive performativities that produce the flawed bodies that refuse to conform to the regulations set up by a discursive hegemonic power.

The First Chapter of this work focuses on the methodologies adopted by a genealogical enquiry by first discussing an essay written in 1873 by Friedrich Nietzsche, 'On Truth and Lying in a Non-moral Sense', where, attempting a polemical attack on the foundational nature of truth, he questions the assumption of a pre-existing subject who must precede the production of concepts, and shows how language with its inherent arbitrariness of the reproduction of meaning of words cannot be a reliable guide for the formulation of concepts and demarcating boundaries of truth. Truth for Nietzsche, in this mode of enquiry, appears to be a human invention that has attained the functionality of authoritatively binding transcendental solidity through repeated reifications over time. This chapter also analyses Michel Foucault's appropriation of genealogy as a critical tool for a hermeneutical approach by showing how in Foucault's reappraisal, the Nietzschean critique of interpretation has now attained the radical possibility of the inexhaustibility of interpretation, along with a revaluation of the originary essence of the sign, so that the efforts of hermeneutics have now become an infinite task. For Foucault, the genealogical enquiry must be able to diagnose the marks and inscriptions of historical conditioning on the corporeal body, how it is entirely imprinted by history along with

its devastations and resistances, to be able to link these with discursive formations of power. For him, the object of the disparate causes that effect history is the body.

The Second Chapter begins with the notion of discourse found in Foucault's earlier explorations into the concept. Foucault's later works augments the concept of this emergence of discursive formations of various institutions with a greater emphasis on the role of power relations and knowledge formation, and the relationship between the regulatory forces of power in the production of discourse and its subjectification of bodies, where he is more interested in exploring the possibilities of exclusion from hegemonic dominations. The second segment of the this chapter focuses primarily on the role of exercising authoritative power in inscribing the body into its controlling mechanism and apparatus to constrain it and to make it a discursive subject through a close reading of Foucault's introductory volume of *The History of Sexuality*, that shows how the subject of sexuality is transformed into a proliferative discourse within the hegemonic exercise of power to creatively engage in constructing newer modes of configurations of desire that impinge on the body to modify it corporeally. The structural constraints that subject the body and its sexuality should, in this theoretical conception of discourse, also include the possibility of reinterpreting the body in a creative way, to translate a body that is not docile and not in conformity with regulatory regimes, to reinscribe this deviant body in newer structures of regulations to appropriate the subversively flawed body.

The Third Chapter discusses the formation of corporeal subject within what Foucault calls the juridical mode of power through a critical analysis of Judith Butler's theorisation of gender as a performative act of enacting, doing, one's gender. Becoming a gender, by enacting a set of performative acts, is a creative project of interpreting cultural reality with all its deterrents, prohibitions, scripted and sanctioned recommendations. The body itself is a construction because it does not have cultural intelligibility prior to the signifying marks of gender and it can be reformulated and reconfigured, as the chapter tries to show, not as a passive medium

but as a contested site capable of transformations. The body generates its significations and interpretations through the relationships of the signifiatory processes; in other words, gender is not a set of culturally and socially imposed attributes, but it is a relational term that is produced through the relationships between socially and culturally constituted subjects in specific contexts and in specific historical conditions.

Chapter Four discusses the problematics involved in conceiving the interdependency of the notions of gender, identity, agency and subjectivity to suggest the theoretical possibility of a political intervention to strategically locate the agency within the relationships of flawed bodies to counter hegemonic heteronormativity for a proliferation of these imposed categories. Certain reformulations of identity cannot coexist within regulatory norms through which the gendered identities acquire acceptability because the juridical strictures deem these flawed identities as logical aberrations. But the consistencies of their existence, their persistence and proliferation necessitate critical opportunities to expose the constructed nature of the foundational categories of sex, gender, identity, subjectivity, and agency proscribed by the hegemonic regulatory regimes, and, therefore, open up the possibilities of discordant, flawed, gender disorder.