

Foucault addresses the issue of sexuality as a function of society. Moreover, he notes that defining and observing “sexuality” before modern (i.e. post-Victorian) times is impossible; that the concept simply did not exist as we might define it today. The modern western society allows an individual to define him- or herself as a homosexual. The definite article, ‘a’, describes the notion of sexuality as a discrete identifier used as a social construct rather than a set of actions performed by a member of the society with continuous (read: non-discrete) desires. In so many words, Foucault describes the social metamorphosis of ‘sexuality’ as an *act* in the pre-Victorian era and now as an *identity* in modern contexts that value action over personal regard. Under close examination here is the “repressive hypothesis” -- the very widespread belief that modern society “represses” our natural sexual desires and (more importantly) its discourse on them.

“Sexual repression,” defined in this way, is a sort of paradox according to Foucault. A state of sexual repression is, quite literally, a state in which notions of sexuality do not enter common thought or discourse. *Repress*, however, is a transitive verb and requires both a repressor and repress-ee (i.e. one being repressed). Note now that societal repression requires transitive actions (either implicit or explicit). In particular, in order to repress sexuality, it must be done so by direct action (including the implicit action in explicitly *not* doing something). This action, however, is precisely in opposition to sexual repression by its very definition. This mutual opposition is a study of a society which Foucault says has been “loudly castigating itself for its hypocrisy, ... speaks verbosely of its own silence, takes great pains to relate in detail the things it does not say, denounces the power it exercises, and promises to liberate itself from the very laws that have made it function.”

At hand, this is a relationship between a society and members within the society. The exaction of power within this society is one of purposeful discursion. By markedly *not* talking about sex and sexuality, the norm is enforced. Similarly, if an effort is made to talk about sex, the social stigmas are so large that the recourse includes the reaffirmation of the society’s view. That is, because society so largely disapproves of sexual discourse, doing so flames so hot in the face of dogma that the society immediately shuns the behavior, associates the behavior with its proponent, and reminds itself that its discursion is for the better.

In practical example, the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy of the Clinton administration contended to show an open attitude toward homosexuals in the armed forces. It stated that an individual’s sexual *identity* was unimportant in the eyes of the government provided it was similarly unimportant in the eyes of the individual. This may seem to support the notion of increased social liberty, but Foucault would say exactly otherwise. Following Foucault, this is a fundamental example of those in power (i.e. the government; the democratic majority of the society) exacting their power to control the connotations of sexuality. The policy by its very name implies that there *ought* to be something wrong with “telling” but that that one must not -- “Don’t Tell.” Foucault would liken this again to the pastor/confessor dilemma. The people say that they will not judge (“[*We*] Don’t Ask”) but that indeed there is something to be judged

(“Don’t Tell [*What You **Have** Done*]”). This forces a discourse on discourse by the exacting power -- the people -- the society itself.

Foucault defines the need to identify self and others as the mere implication that there is indeed something to be identified. This notion is conceived in a past where a society did judge wonton pleasure as an insult to society. This is traced to an ironically self-destructive revolution that continues today.