

Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

NOEL DYCK (Ed.), *Exploring Regimes of Discipline: The Dynamics of Restraint*. New York: Berghahn Books, 2008, 157 p., index.

Exploring Regimes of Discipline is an ambitious collection of essays that covers issues relevant to students and academics working in the fields of cultural anthropology, sociology and other related fields. The central aim of the collection is to position discipline, an overused yet sometimes poorly understood concept, outside the ostensibly traditional understanding of an institutionalized form of power associated with various levels of coercion. In doing so the book presents a dizzying number of topics, including chapters on horse racing, school politics, hospital porters, “third way” governance, aikido, and fertilization. This variability can be attributed to the contributors’ goal of reworking theory about discipline through unique and refined ethnographic practices. My review will comment on particular segments of the volume, focusing on the numerous conceptualizations of discipline.

The collection is rather short, only seven chapters. As a common theme, the authors problematize the usual application of discipline as an absence of human agency. Volume editor Noel Dyck, for example, claims that Foucaultian analyses often equate discipline with repression and institutional coercion, regarding power as an impersonal apparatus that acts on docile bodies. Dyck argues that this approach discounts the effects of cultural and human characteristics on manifestations of discipline. While this may be characteristic of a majority of governmentality scholarship, Foucault’s work after *Discipline and Punish* provides a more nuanced understanding of the creative and productive facets of disciplinary power, and this collection follows this trajectory in his later work.

The collection’s emphasis on uncovering the everyday use of discipline in various settings is quite original. Academic discussions of discipline often emphasize institutionalized structures, formal or informal hierarchies and their connection to coercion. In contrast to this, Susanne Adahl’s discussion of amateur horse racing presents an examination of the relationship between trainer and horse. Adahl claims that the trainer-horse relationship is unlike Foucault’s institutional discipline inasmuch as it is pragmatic, not bound by preset rules, and based on cooperation (36-37). In my view, Adahl’s non-traditional approach to discipline forces us to think beyond accepted boundaries.

Helle Bungaard and Eva Gullov present an equally intriguing study of the practical application of a Danish educational policy in two public schools. The document, disciplinary in its intended application, sets out requirements for assessing the language abilities of immigrant children. It follows a clear institutional logic that problematizes immigrant children as posing a risk when

not proficient in the official language, and uses technologies of screening, assessment and training. Such a policy is rightly described as disciplinary given the techniques used to transform a human quality. Bungaard and Gullov find that the policy generates unintended consequences manifested in various forms of resistance. However, it should not be surprising that any policy, when applied in the “real world” results in unforeseen outcomes. Such a trend is well documented in studies of crime control policies.

Nigel Rapport examines hospital porters’ constant challenge to the authoritative structures of hospital hierarchy. He documents how porters reorganize their workplace into “their own microsocial sphere” (71). Rapport reasserts individual existence into definitions of discipline to describe porters’ renegotiations of their social position within the hospital. This insight is important because it problematizes the lessened importance of human agency within some social theorizing. However, Rapport attributes too much significant power to the porters’ ability to redefine, re-operationalize and reconfigure their position, which often resemble simple coping mechanisms that carve out a niche within the existing power structure without changing much else. Nevertheless, Rapport rightly points out the theoretical (and practical) dangers of reductionist approaches to discipline and pushes for a more comprehensive treatment of discipline sensitive to human agency and individual power.

Tamara Kohn engages discipline through the examination of aikido, a Japanese martial art. From the outset, Kohn positions this type of discipline as fundamentally distinct from institutional, coercive and repressive forms of power. In her view, discipline is liberating, creative and productive. This insight draws our attention to a perhaps neglected aspect of the martial arts. She argues that “the creative involvement in disciplinary activities like aikido, through and beyond mimesis, absorb our full attention, actively capture our imagination, and constitute activities full of enjoyment and potential creative freedom and power” (103). Kohn’s argument emerges from her conceptualization of practicing aikido as a matter of choice, not coercion. In this sense, there is a significant difference in how aikido discipline can be understood, as opposed to disciplinary regimes in total institutions. Kohn also states that aikido is “rigorous but not punitive” (110). Finally, Kohn introduces freedom as a clear indicator of the difference within aikido discipline and that of some other leisure practices. One is free to leave if one desires. Clearly, this is quite different from discipline in total institutions. Kohn’s argument holds merit in her attempt to formulate an understanding of self-discipline distinct, at least in part, from institutional and total forms of disciplinary power. Aikido provides, at its roots, a possibility of setting one free from the body under the almost automatized practice of self-discipline. In this sense, it is at once liberating and bounding, which is an often neglected aspect of discipline.

Esther Peperkamp discusses “natural family planning” as a technology of discipline within Poland’s Catholic Church. She provides a persuasive argument that the Catholic Church’s engagement with the medical knowledge of reproduction provides a new form of religious discipline aimed at controlling (and partially co-opting) the sexuality of married couples (and indeed younger church goers). Most importantly, Peperkamp highlights the importance of

knowledge and its various relations to discipline, exemplified in the case of the Second Vatican Council's reinvention of sexuality. Peperkamp's insightful discussion reveals the working of both knowledge-creating processes and their (re)configuration within disciplinary regimes.

The final contribution to the volume, by Peter Collins, is perhaps the most insightful addition to theorizing about discipline. Namely, he shows how discipline as an analytic tool provides new opportunities to examine the development of disciplinary regimes. Taking discipline as a tool, it is possible to locate not only coercion but, as in the case of Collins' examination of Quaker discipline, restraint or other forms of self- or group-control as founding mechanisms.

The selected examples above highlight the possibilities of engaging discipline in innovative ways. *Exploring Regimes of Discipline* showcases a small, but impressive nugget of contemporary theorizing within the social sciences. This book would be rewarding for diverse readers because it provokes discussion about, and engagement with, discipline in new and innovative ways. It would be of particular interest to those engaged in critically exploring the theme of discipline and the connections between humans and societal relations.

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