

REVIEW

Lori Reed & Paula Saukko (eds.), *Governing the Female Body: Gender, Health, and Networks of Power* (New York: SUNY Press, 2010), ISBN: 978-438429526

Governing the Female Body is an exciting collection of twelve papers edited by Reed and Saukko, which seeks to "critically analyse the multidimensional networks of power" that govern "the female body with a view of advancing its health" and which also govern *through* health. (3-4) The contributions are grouped under four categories, focussing on the mediated, economic, political and scientific dimensions of processes that govern female bodies. The collection draws on feminist and Foucauldian theoretical traditions to analyse the constitution of "female bodies and selves" (2) through diverse case studies. It encompasses a broad area of scholarship, with contributions that will be of particular interest to those working on gender and health, especially from within cultural studies, Foucault studies, social theory, and bioethics. The Foucauldian character of the collection is organised around Foucault's work on governance and governmentality, and is influenced by the work of contemporary figures in this field such as Nikolas Rose. This volume is an exciting exploration because, although there have been engagements between feminist and Foucauldian thought, governmentality "has received limited attention by feminists." (Mennel, 253)

Saukko and Reed introduce governmentality as a theoretical position to analyse "power." This theoretical position emphasises that power is "network-like," rather than hierarchical and "always both constraining and enabling" or "productive." (3) The Foucauldian understanding of power found in governmentality encourages the examination of political power at both macro and micro scales, by seeking to identify "the link between political governance of populations and the intimate governance of bodies and selves." (2) However, political government is only one agent amongst others. No single agent in a power network is argued to be fundamental to, or the primary element that explains social systems. Instead, we are presented with a more complicated and nuanced analysis of the "messy politics" (9) of intricate, interweaving networks of power as they relate to the bio-political government and self-government of female bodies, selves, and health. Many of the contributors also provide an overview of their own interpretation of this theoretical backdrop as it relates to their paper, making the Foucauldian angle highly accessible.

One of the core arguments that echoes throughout part one on "mediated self-health" is that, whilst contemporary discourse on medical care emphasises empowering individuals, the rhetoric and practices associated with this empowerment simultaneously act as a form of individualised self-governance. In separate contributions Blackman, Saukko, and Reed ex-

plore a variety of examples of how the notion of empowered "self-health" is mediated through popular culture, for example through narratives in popular women's magazines; online health-related discussion groups; and the medical and psychological discourses of addiction. Part two investigates some of the economic dimensions involved in the governance of female bodies in and through gendered healthcare discourses, using case studies on breast cancer survivor movements; menstruation; and depression and the productive female body in the workplace. Part three looks at "transnational body politics" as it relates to the gendered nature of contraception; population control; and racial and ethnic constructions of sexual bodies. Part four analyses scientific discourses on gender and the constitution of the "natural" female body as they occur in IVF; s/m and the feminist "sex wars" of the late 20th century; and genetic and genomic classifications of human sex and gender.

This collection draws together a suitably diverse range of case studies to critically highlight the variety of ways in which gender and the female body are constituted as objects of knowledge and are also subject to government through discourses and practices related to health care. Each paper displays fascinating insights that illustrate the continuing relevance of Foucauldian studies to the present. Whilst we must attend to the new forms and processes of subjectification and the novel dynamics that constitute female bodies and selves, this collection also reminds us that traditional normative models of femininity are continually reinscribed within contemporary discourses of empowerment. For example, Lori Reed's analysis of the discourses surrounding internet addiction shows that confession and the medical-psychological "addiction apparatus" function to manage "individual and social bodies" by encouraging self-transformation into "a normal computer user and healthy woman/mother." (69) The "unruly woman" (72) who resists such classificatory schemes and instead challenges the gendered politics of internet addiction "becomes suspect"—her resistance to the addiction apparatus becomes "mobilized as further "proof" of her pathology." (74) Reed's resistant subject is also paralleled in separate contexts in other papers in the volume, such as women depicted in magazine narratives who are deemed to have failed to govern themselves effectively and are thus marked as "pathological," serving as "cautionary tales" for readers. (Blackman, 22) Discipline lays at the edges of governmentality, ready to pathologise and normalise those who fail to govern themselves.

Barbara Mennel's contribution in section four is refreshing in its questioning of both feminist discourse and the "limits of [...] governmentality" (255) as an analytical framework for discussing the notions of gender at work in the "sex wars" of the 1980s and 1990s. She notes that whilst governmentality "when applied to gender, enables us to carve out normalizing forces, the term itself [...] does not take into account the specific ways in which normalcy is produced as gender." (261) Mennel notes that governmentality can go some way towards uncovering the normativity embedded in discourses on gender, power and subjectivity by drawing attention to essentialist or reductive notions of femininity, sexuality and identity—as illustrated, for example, by Reed and Blackman's chapters discussed above. However, Mennel contends that we also need to analyse "counter-institutional practices and sites of abjection" (267) and recognise the real challenges that resistant subjectivities pose to governmental regimes. Although it is important to highlight the "idealizations and historical blind spots" (268) present in Foucault's work, it should be noted that such counter-institu-

tional practices have been recognised as relevant to governmentality without necessarily reducing them to unwittingly normalising accomplices in the operation of power. Counter-conduct is perhaps a key concept that can be used to bring such discussions into the theoretical remit of a governmentality framework. Nevertheless, the lack of attention given to it in the field of governmentality studies perhaps suggests the salience of the difficulties that Mennel brings to light, and indicates a present blind-spot in our own thinking. The contentious issue surrounding the emergence of counter-conducts and perhaps what we may term "counter-subjectivities" does require more critical attention, and could have been a more prominent theme throughout this collection of papers. The dynamic encounters between governmentality and resistant subjectivities will continue to pose an interesting challenge for further research on contemporary modes of governance.

Whilst governmentality theorists generally stop short of issuing normative claims, the authors in *Governing the Female Body* have shown that it is a tool that calls us to question processes and discourses that might otherwise appear neutral, and to identify the ways in which they operate as governmental practices between the scales of macro and micro body politics. One of the greatest strengths about this work is that whilst we can identify common trends in contemporary modes of governance, there is no attempt to draw these threads *too* neatly together. The papers call attention to the operation of power at the intersection of politics, bodies, and selves, without trying to theorise a new universalising grand narrative. By using a governmentality-approach, emphasis is placed on the disunity, diversity, contradictions, and struggles within networks of power as they impinge on the constitution of gendered selves. It is another assembly of thought well worth reading that is clearly influenced by the spirit of enquiry initiated by Burchell, Gordon and Miller's *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), which inspired wider interest in the eclectic field of "governmentality studies." Debate will undoubtedly continue about the importance placed upon Foucault's own theorisation of governmentality by contemporary scholars, its scope, and whether its alleged novelty is over-emphasised in some circles. However, *Governing the Female Body* does manage to illustrate that this field of study yields fascinating analyses alongside other Foucauldian tools. It demands that the gendered nature of power becomes subject to renewed critical scrutiny.

Sarah Maidman
University of Kent
Religious Studies Department
United Kingdom
sarahmaidman@gmail.com