**The Subject and Subjectivity**

An Examination of Subjectivity as a Process and Concept

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Subjectivity, as a term often refers to personal feelings, or more specifically, how each person feels and makes their own opinions. For Foucault, subjectivity not only refers to this definition but operates as a process. Every person is a subject, that is a result of the various institutions within a society. Each person takes all that they experience, all of the culture they have been introduced to and uses it to form who they are. While subjects can interpret their community differently, and differences will occur, they are all limited to what they are exposed to, and this can be sanctioned. The subjectivity can change with time, although it is not necessary, but the subject will be different as a result, and the subject can vary as their life continues. The inherent differences of each subject also have an impact; two subjects can live in the same country, go to the same school, work in the same place, but if they are a different race or gender, their experiences may be different. In addition, the treatment they receive from society, and this contributes to the formation of their identity. Identity is not organic or original in Foucault thought, and he is correct in conjecturing that a person does not truly make their own identity, it is controlled by what they are exposed to and reinforced through social pressures. Even social relationships are a form of reinforcement and intimacy subject to control and another tool by which people shape their existence. These theories are asserted through historical documentation and earlier works by the likes of Descartes and Kant, as well as more modern writers like Kelly and Cheney-Lippold, who take a critical and explanative approach to his work. While it is unavoidable to be a subject, one should be aware of the processes by which they become one, even if only to be made available when criticizing the institutions that shape them. Without awareness the government has power and there is risk of exploitation, but with criticism and understanding, there at least can be influence without domination.

A subject needs to develop and there is no guarantee that the person will stay the same through their life. A subject can be formed and reformed, though it is more difficult for a person to learn and change as they get older. Each person's development is random, based only on birth, although once they are born they will be subjected to the culture they live with. One of the debated issues around subjectivity is change. For Foucault, it does change, though that change may not be rapid. Change is progressive and subjectivity is subject to it. A person cannot control subjectivity. Time is the only factor that controls subjectivity. This is one of Foucault's arguments that has received contention, although Kelly backs it up by writing that "it contradicts the traditional notion of subjectivity as historically invariant and transcendent" (513.) One point that he also clarifies is that the body and soul are not same, and referring to a subject and their creation has nothing to do with the organism, but what they perceive and take from their experiences. Kelly also explains, "These are “ not something invented by the individual himself. They are models that he finds in his culture and are proposed, suggested, imposed upon him by his culture, his society, and his social group ” (EW1, 291). This is one way, indeed, in which the subject is not purely self - creating (Kelly, 517). A subject can be defined by their actions because they demonstrate what has made them, although their physical body is not of concern within this argument. The body is secondary to the mind and really only a vessel.

If anything should be clear from this paper, it is that no person can create their identity and nothing is truly organic. That does not have to be a despondent thought but is perhaps the only thing one can take from Foucault with certainty. The power of the government and various institutions are vast, though they may seem more apparent in some countries, particularly those with a communist or strict government. For example, North Korea is a nation that attempts to keep their business private and remain separate from the rest of the world. The citizens are not only subjects, but subjects in the literal definition in that they belong to their government and responsible to them as a duty. They are treated as though they belong to their government, and their subjectivity is more rigid. That is not to say that each country does not have its own rigidity. All nations are individuals are participants. Whether the laws are strict and enforced in a country or community, society always acts as a governing body. In essence, all people, are all subjects and they all operate as police. To extend Foucault's theory, every person is a metaphorical police officer and they also act as a government and preventative body. They act in place of the government in private circles and it is inevitable by being in society. The fear and pressure placed on everyone to fit in, and the wonder over what other people will think if they say something wrong, is enough to pressure to guide subjects into accepted behaviour. As discussed in *Discipline and Punishment,* Foucault remarks on the shift Western society has made from public Execution to a private one, and the abolishment of it in some countries (page 7.) Although there is less of a physical threat and enforcement, the fear over committing a crime remains the same. There is no need for a display, and the government intimidates the same way, although the reprimanding has changed.

In terms of the 20th century, one of the most significant institutions to reach the Western world is film and television. As opposed to many of these institutions that are based on necessity, film is based on entertainment. People actively seek out the cinema when it could be avoided easier than any other institution. That particular factor is not lost on the groups that produce and distribute them either. These mediums allow for widespread propaganda and an entertaining demonstration of proper values. In 1930, when the Production Code was implemented, film became censored. Censorship alone indicates that certain behaviours are unacceptable and inappropriate, encourages audiences to copy the filmic heroes. For example, within the Code, an extra-marital affair could not be the subject of a comedy and the characters participating cannot benefit from it, they must be shown to have some kind of struggle. Presenting this behaviour as having repercussions and rewarding the *Leave it to Beaver-*esqe families', this Code gives viewers the impression that they should act as the characters do, and thus subjects them to coercion. An example of the censorship the Code presented is as follows, "No picture shall be produced which will lower the moral standards of those who see it. Hence the sympathy of the audience shall never be shown to the side of crime, wrong-doing, evil or sin," (Mondello). This is not only censorship but clearly a force. It was apparent that films have an impact and that it needed to be used to shape the audience. While the Code was eliminated, a rating system for films still exists and though films do have the option of making a graphic one if so inclined, there still is the pressure of financial success as well as receiving backing by a studio. For a film to reach all audiences it has to be rated G, and a movie with an accessible rating is more likely to make money and be funded because everyone could possibly see it. One company that has struggled with the rating system is *Marvel. Marvel* has made a variety of superhero films, though they have tried not to go above a 14A rating to ensure the films can be seen by all, even if kids have to take their parents. While some characters like Logan and Deadpool are violent and graphic in their respective comics, the first attempts made to bring those characters to film were washed out and kid-friendly, even when the material inherently is not. This results in a less interesting film because it is not assertive; it attempts to please all and in doing so contributes to the process of subjectivity. Viewers may not realize it but for a film to monitor its content to project a specific image of "mild" violence to children sends a variety of messages. It limits storytelling and values the prospect of money over fidelity, and can also give the impression that mild violence is acceptable because it is often ensuing jokes. Choosing to limit what is shown constructs a picture of what should be done and what is permissible. It proves that there are expectations about the way the age groups behave and that the government is still using every resource possible to reach their audience.

Kelly details much of Foucault's work better than anyone else. He writes, "If we put these together we get the following picture: the subject constitutes itself in different forms at different times through the use of varied practices, but always by distinguishing itself from the physical body that engages in those practices" (513.) The idea of the body being separate from the individual is profound and highlights how these processes can change. Foucault has made awareness essential, though not assertiveness, which makes his work fascinating to write about and also important. His ideas are experiential, and to extend this thought further, there is the implication that a person does not come into being, or awareness without experience. They need to have experience simply to be given a way to understand themselves. Their actions will come from a desire to copy others and also impress. A society is comprised of individuals, but when taken as a collective it creates fear and discomfort so subjects want to fit in; this is another institution that governs by making it rewarding to fit in. One of the quotes included in Cohen's article is from former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, "I think we have gone through a period when too many children and people have been given to understand 'I have a problem, it is the Government’s job to cope with it!' or 'I have a problem, I will go and get a grant to cope with it!' 'I am homeless, the Government must house me!' and so they are casting their problems on society and who is society? There is no such thing!" (Cohen, 1.) Although society as a body has no legal power, it is a place where the institutions combine and the influences of each are clear. While part of being in a society and voting to support a government does involve voluntary subjection to a governing body, the very collection of relationship makes it the most powerful institutions; relationships, even if they are on a small scale are influential and cannot be taken for granted.

The logic of Foucault is still incredibly relevant and has many modern extensions. Once such extension of the thought has been written about at length by the philosopher Sam Harris. For him, nobody is born with a claim to free will as the environment each subject is born into conditions them to the point where it eliminates choice. A murderer does not just decide to commit that act, but is formed by an ongoing series of events in their life that logically explain why they did that (Harris). These formative events are the processes of subjectivity. Rather than explore these processes, he delves into the effect they have on the people; essentially he looks at it from a backwards perspective. He will look at something a person did, or who they say they are and then explore those processes and the way they made them, rather than the processes and what they are capable of doing. Although he uses this to expose his belief in the illusion of free will, the thoughts are nearly the same as those expressed by Foucault. This shows the effect Foucault's work has had and further implications it makes. Within every action, there is years of hardwiring that encourages specific behaviour. It would not be wrong to say that being a subject involves a loss of freedom and makes subjectivity intimidating.

As Kelly noted, Foucault's work on subjectivity is thoughtful, although not concrete. As a result, many of the works that try to extend this notion of subject and subjectivity are larger, explanative and critical. That is something to be said for Foucault in that his opinions are at times, somewhat incomprehensible, though it is appropriate given that these processes change over time. One becomes a subject through their participation with various institutions, and they exercise control by implementing practices to shape and control their lives. Being a subject is unavoidable, though it is not necessarily negative. It is a huge factor in deterring crime and if the subject feels satisfied with the identity they have made, there is little reason for them to complain.

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