

Book Review/CompteRendu

Taylor, Chloë, *Foucault, Feminism and Sex Crimes: An Anti-Carceral Analysis*. New York: Routledge, 2019, pp. 272, \$39.16, paper, (9780367664992).

In her book *Foucault, Feminism and Sex Crimes: An Anti-Carceral Analysis* Chloë Taylor (2019) attempts to interpret and apply Michel Foucault's theories of sexuality and criminal punishment directly to the social and judicial response to sexually-based crimes. In doing so, she devises a blueprint for accounting for sexual violence that attempts to acknowledge the standpoint of survivors and victims of sexual violence. Taylor uses her interpretation of Foucault's theories to advance claims about the criminal justice system's ineffectuality in responding to sex crimes and sexual violence. In fact, *Foucault, Feminism and Sex Crimes* makes an important case for the role of the prison in perpetuating such violence. The work consolidates feminist scholarship on sexual violence with Foucault's more general social theory to build a feminist prison abolitionism informed by poststructuralism. Taylor challenges the diffuse quality of psychiatric and prison institutions and their influence on the identities of victims and perpetrators of sex crimes. The book does, at times, seem to suggest that survivors' demands for justice are responsible for the ever expanding prison system. However, by addressing where feminist scholarship may lean too heavily on psychological and criminal discourses, Taylor accounts for gaps in critical feminist responses to sexual violence and highlights the places where prison abolition scholarship can develop tools for engagement with issues of sexual violence.

The meeting point in Foucault's two widely-read genealogies, *Discipline & Punish* (1975) and *History of Sexuality* (1976), forms the theoretical basis for *Foucault, Feminism and Sex Crimes*. Taylor's work asks how sexology, psychology and their related discourses inform sexuality with regard to violence. Simultaneously, it challenges criminology's complicity in the process by which being identified as a sexual criminal will make one more likely to behave as such (2019, 18). This process is the starting point from which Taylor explores both discourses of the criminal and of sex crimes themselves – as well as illuminating the areas where a feminist perspective challenges Foucault's stance on sex offenders and their treatment.

Taylor's work is overtly political, engaging with prison abolition theory to put Foucault's work in conversation with movements that envision an alternative to the prison system. Drawing on the work of prison

abolition scholars and activists (Bernstein 2012; Davis 2003; Gilmore 2007), Taylor uses Foucault's *Discipline & Punish* to argue the prison is not a useful solution to sexual violence. Taylor's thesis on sexual violence upholds Foucault's assertion that "the prison is diffuse across society" (2019, 217), making it challenging to critique the carceral system embedded within a carceral *society*. However, she also uses this assertion to claim that restorative and transformative justice practices can serve as a method of challenging the diffuse panoptical model that defines power relations across social structures (1975, 205). Despite her criticism of Foucault's work to decriminalize sex crimes in France (2019, 30), Taylor suggests that the de-stigmatization of sexual crime *is* a feminist project. She writes that efforts to counter the stigma of sex crimes recognizes that these crimes happen in the context of a diffuse and hegemonic rape culture, rather than exclusively in the hands of deviant sexual criminals (225-6).

Considering the history of rape as a legitimized and trivialized act, it is likely that some feminists will find Taylor's theoretical perspective incongruent with their own work on sexual violence in its prioritization of the sympathetic deconstruction of sexual criminals. Many feminist theorists and sociologists have previously critiqued Foucault's perspective on such issues. For instance, Johanna Oksala refers to Foucault's disregard for the subjective experience of sexual violence as a form of 'epistemic arrogance' (2011, 209).

Although Taylor provides a careful discussion of the factors that constrain perpetrators, prioritizing the position of the sexual criminal can underplay the powerful discursive factors that constrain the victim's voice and place in society (Alcoff and Gray 1993; Naples 2003). Taylor's work *does* make a strong case for the importance of listening to the voices and experiences of sex crime victims. The project is, however, slightly undermined when the constraints to survivor's calls for justice are ignored. While 'Tough on Crime' laws may have their roots in liberal feminist campaigns for sex crime and domestic violence legislation (2019, 99), the messages of these movements have been co-opted by judicial and carceral institutions to serve transformed and decontextualized purposes. Although ultimately, Taylor upholds the assertion that rape is traumatic and that it is a gendered experience (54), her analysis does not fully account for how the calls for judicial responses to rape are further constrained by rape culture. The criminal justice system is one of few routes to voice and action for those who have experienced sexual violence, and as such it seems an overstep to root criticism of sex crime reform entirely in the purview of Western feminism, considering the foundational aspects of liberalism on Western society values.

Despite any such simplifications, by utilizing Foucault's analysis of the control exerted by *psychiatric* institutions (Foucault 1965; 1999; 2003), Taylor's work illuminates how the wide adoption of trauma discourses can be used to further exert control over both victims and offenders of sex crimes. The control exerted by institutions such as psychiatry and the prison system itself determine how narratives of sexual violence are told by victims and how these narratives are consumed and understood (Alcoff and Gray 1993; Naples 2003). Taylor's analysis takes this further, arguing that these institutions tend to actually create more sexual violence by dictating the experiences of identified victims and offenders.

Chloë Taylor's work attempts to both build upon and challenge Foucault, as well as construct an understanding of sexual violence and crimes that is rooted in poststructuralist thought. While Taylor's analysis misattributes some blame for the ubiquity of the prison to the feminist movement, she does outline several normative propositions for alternatives to the current judicial and prison systems that punish sexual offenders: preventative justice, redistributive justice, and transformative justice. By addressing these alternatives, Taylor offers a way beyond liberal feminist conceptualizations of justice. These new ways provide fertile ground for sociologists to assess for their usefulness. Taylor's work challenges feminist scholars and activists to fight back against sexual violence from a standpoint that actively challenges the widespread harm caused by the prison system. If challenging rape culture and responding properly to sexual violence is a scholarly goal, how we respond to sexual violence matters. By utilizing prison abolition literature, Taylor pulls her analysis out of the purely theoretical and towards a blueprint for a movement against sexual violence that acknowledges rape culture as beyond the fault of those labelled deviant by the judicial, psychiatric, and prison systems. This work should be a critical read for any sociologist engaging with Foucault on issues of sexual violence and feminism.

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