

POL S 305: Worksheet on Foucault, *History of Sexuality* V 1

1. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=98fBiOVEcyI>. Watch from 1,55 to 7,00.

Your problem, Henry [Cohn's doctor, who has just diagnosed him with AIDS], is that you are hung up on words. On labels. "Gay", "homosexual", "lesbian"; you think they tell you what a person is, but they don't tell you that. Like all labels, they refer to one thing and one thing only: Clout. Where does a person so identified fit in the food chain? To someone who doesn't understand this, homosexual is what I am because I sleep with men, but this is wrong. A homosexual is someone who, in fifteen years of trying, can't get a pissant anti-discrimination bill through City Council. They are men who know nobody, and who nobody knows. Now, Henry, does that sound like me? No. I have clout. Lots. I have sex with men; but, unlike nearly every other man of which this is true, I bring the guy I'm screwing to Washington, and President Reagan smiles at us and shakes his hand.

—Roy Cohn, in "Angels in America," play by Tony Kushner
(premier 1991, set in 1985, TV production 2003)

In this famous monologue, prominent right-wing lawyer and homophobic McCarthyite Roy Cohn (who is dying of AIDS) describes himself. Do you interpret him as simply a hypocrite who doesn't want to "come out," or is there, in light of reading Foucault, something else you could say about this monologue? How, in 2018 (over thirty years after this play is set), can we think about the long (and perhaps unfinished) list of "sexual minorities" (LGBT[S]IQQAA+) who have since emerged making political claims for recognition and rights? Is the lengthening of this list and the increased visibility of those who identify with its letters a sign of "progress"?

2. In Ontario earlier this year, Premier Doug Ford's new provincial government rolled back 2015 reforms to sex education curriculum in schools that included consent, gender identity, same-sex relationships, digital safety, and masturbation (see website link). (The previous 1998 curriculum didn't include these topics, and focused more on human sexual anatomy and reproductive biology.) Those supporting the rollback say that these topics are age-inappropriate and imply that children are sexually active, and sexually active in some ways they consider unethical; they also objected to teaching students about gender fluidity or trans identity, claiming these were ideological and unscientific topics. Instead, parents should be the ones to teach children about sexual ethics and relationships, they argue. The 2015 curriculum is supported by those who argue that it reflects the issues students actually face, reflecting their concern about sexual assault, bullying of gender-nonconforming peers, homophobia, and sexual exploitation and bullying on-line. What do you think Foucault would say about this debate? Does he clearly support one side or the other? Is he helpful, in your opinion? What do *you* think?

3. On October 2 2018, a dissident Saudi journalist, Jamal Khashoggi, entered the Saudi Embassy in Istanbul, Turkey—the country in which he was living—to collect papers that would allow him to marry his Turkish fiancée. He appears to have been tortured, murdered, and his body dismembered and disposed of by agents of the Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (the de facto leader of the kingdom of Saudi Arabia). Assuming this is what happened, what kind of exercise of power is this, in Foucault's terms (see pp. 135-6)? How and why does this form of power reappear in the modern world? What would be a disciplinary or even a biopolitical engagement with dissidents?