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November 1, 2018  
SOC 30390

### The Invisible Panopticon: Socialization as a Mechanism of Gendered Social Control

Regardless of the prevailing illusion that we exist in a world where our decisions are ours and ours alone, our society is chock-full of structures riddled with rigid social norms that influence our feelings, thoughts, words, and actions. While “some degree of order and regularity must be assured if social life... is to be sustained,” the line between maintaining social order and obsessive regulation is continually blurred and redrawn in our every-changing, increasingly-technological realm (Roberts, 1979, p. 30). The assumption that social order is integral to societal stability is fair and, most would argue, valid, yet is it *completely* necessary to monitor each and every aspect of social life? Will the world tilt off its axis and plummet into disarray if we collectively refuse to conform to gender norms? Although not explicitly linked to the realm of crime itself, the work of Erving Goffman in his key text, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1956), underscores the notion of socialization as a process by which the social world is regulated and controlled, creating unspoken yet very real codes of conduct by which we willingly adhere. In turn, an imagined panopticon, a self-constructed prison guarded by society’s addiction to mitigate stigma by adhering to social norms and constructions, regulates the individual and can be analyzed through a gendered oculus.

Prior to delving into a gendered discussion rooted in the work of Goffman, Bentham, and Foucault, is it imperative to briefly define the metaphoric, dramaturgical terms Erving Goffman employed in *The Presentation of Everyday Life*. First and foremost, Goffman’s platform for all “performances,” or social interactions, exists in the “front,” on a stage where individuals showcase their highly-rehearsed “roles” associated with social life (Goffman, 1990, pgs. 30, 32, 109). For example, I, a woman in her early twenties, can and do play the roles of daughter, sister, girlfriend, student, and friend among many others. Assigned to each role is an array of different “audiences” that fluctuate in conjunction with numerous settings as well as aforementioned characters (Goffman, 1990, pg. 23, 33).

However, Goffman also stresses the importance of the “backstage region,” or private area where a performer can rehearse their roles in accordance to the feedback they receive from their audiences (Goffman, 1990, pg. 37). Interestingly, the performer often finds herself idealizing her impression to hypnotize her audiences in an attempt to diminish social critique (Goffman, 1990, pg. 51).

The entirety of these performances culminates into a process of socialization, where recitals are heavily idealized, “molded and modified to fit into the understanding and expectations of society in which it is presented” (Goffman, 1990, pg. 44). Here, the performer tends “to incorporate and exemplify the officially accredited values of society, in fact, than does his behavior as a whole,” reinforcing the prescribed role and leaving no wiggle room for potential divergence (Goffman, 1990, pg. 45). If even a shred of self-expression shines through the cracks of a performer’s mask, Goffman argues that she will return backstage to amend the error.

Where Goffman’s work is rooted in the notion that performers are in a constant state of rehearsal to ensure said situation does not occur, I digress. Because we as performers are almost perpetually surveilled on stage, or at least “always feel as though under inspection,” I believe we actively and willingly construct individual panoptic prisons where the mere feeling of everlasting inspection facilitates a necessity to self-regulate and adhere to the behaviors prescribed to our roles (Bentham, 1791). Of course, while Bentham’s panopticon was originally designed as a physical “penitentiary inspection-house,” I feel the structure can lend its hand in ominously metaphorizing the process of socialization using Goffmanian terms through a gendered oculus from a feminine perspective (Bentham, 1791).

In the imagined panopticon, the “performer” exists in a cell that occupies the circumference of the prison, which acts as the onstage setting for their presentation (Bentham, 1791). The “inspector’s lodge” is occupied by the performer’s “audiences” (Bentham, 1791). In the panoptic prison, the inmates only have one audience and are therefore blatantly aware of their behavioral expectations. However, in

the imagined, Goffmanian panopticon, performers must juggle the array of audiences and ever-changing expectations that align with their fluctuating roles. This notion translates to our obsession with heightened surveillance techniques, both in our lived and cyber world, including optical, locational, and eavesdropping devices (Fox, 2001, pgs. 255-256; Leclercq-vandelannoitte, Isaac & Kalika, 2014, pg. 543-544). As we greet each new day and enter the social realm, we are subjected to an ever-increasing number of audiences: those watching the CCTV cameras present at nearly every turn, our posse of followers on various social media platforms, and even prying algorithms tracking every click on the Internet (Fox, 2001, pgs. 255-256; Leclercq-vandelannoitte, Isaac & Kalika, 2014, pg. 543-544). The multiplicity of audiences that emerge inside the inspector's lodge keep the performer unendingly on her toes, in constant fear of mistake and furthermore, scrutiny.

Interestingly, it seems that this culture of heightened surveillance actualized in the panopticon erases the backstage region that is integral to the creation of socialized order in *The Presentation of Self*. This amendment leaves the performer trapped in their metaphorical panopticon without anywhere to rehearse; therefore, the performer is perpetually onstage, or so they think, leaving the individual with little choice but to self-regulate their behavior in accordance to the expectations of the audiences within the inspector's lodge. In the structural panopticon "prison punishes delinquency and delinquency is for the most part produced in and by an incarceration;" yet, the same rings true in this metaphoric prison. Here, the lack of rehearsal time and the perpetual performance produces and reinforces strict "social roles" and with it a behavioral code that have almost always been previously established prior to the actor's first performance (Foucault, 1978, p. 301; Goffman, 1990, p. 37).

To further the application of this metaphorical, socialized panopticon, I will translate these ideas into the realm of gender through the oculus of social control on both a macro and micro, familial and personal, scale. Sociological literature teems with gendered analyses of social life that highlight the affect that socially maintained and reinforced gender norms have on all genders; however, I will

highlight the profound influence socialization has on women in their everyday lives. While I recognize that this discussion cannot be representative of all female identities, I will focus on the feminine experience that which I relate most.

Although the notions of the setting of the home and audience that is the nuclear family seems to be a personal or familial construction at face value, these structures and the traditional roles that women perform within said settings (homemakers, child bearers, and mechanisms for socialization of the youth) are integral to the stability of our treasured, overarching social order (Heidensohn, 780). Here, it is argued throughout feminine sociological discourses, that the home serves as primary source of informally sourced control (Heidensohn, 1996, pg. 163; Dahl and Snare, 1978, p. 21). If the home is a panopticon, the inspector's lodge houses the nuclear family and neighbors; their judgmental eyes are seemingly omnipresent. Synonymously, the home is the setting where the woman acts her domestic performances. Goffman uses an array of examples throughout the text of *The Presentation of Self* to highlight the necessity of domestic performances in the affirmation of a female's "subservient" role in comparison with the superiority of the male (1990, p. 48).

Additionally, the home exudes very little privacy for the woman, little time to rehearse backstage; even when the matriarch of the house is alone, she is still surveilled, still performing, as she is checked through completion of domestic tasks: it is expected that the washing is complete, dinner is cooked, and the children's lunches are packed and ready for school the following morning (Heidensohn, 1996, pg. 167). Failure to conform results in socializing punishments ranging from unconventional to barbaric for nondomestic women, including gossip, divorce, and sexual and domestic abuse (Heidensohn, 1996, pg. 167; Westlund, 1999. Pgs. 1046-1047). The risk of these punishments alone is enough to socialize and regulate women to adhere to her domestic role and perform according to societal standards.

However, the imagined panopticon of endless performance is not restricted to the confines of the stability of macro-level societal order and control as a whole. The individual female body itself is also subject to dictation of society while audiences watch, critique, and guard social norms, just as disciplinary structures have regulated the body just as they regulate schools, prisons, and other arenas of control (Bartky, 1997, pgs. 129, 136-137; Westlund, 1999, 1045-1046). I recognize that I am a prisoner to my audiences in my own imagined panopticon on a variety of levels; however, it is most evident to me in the act of grooming. An “ornamented surface,” the female body is expected to “soft, supple, hairless, and smooth” (Bartky, 1997, p. 136). Why? How does this benefit me? Truthfully, it does not. Yet, even in the bitter cold winter, when my legs are certainly not exposed to potential audiences, I shave my to avoid potential scolds or strange hypothetical stares; I have been conditioned, due to the illusion of constant surveillance, to self-regulate in fear of punishment or chastisement from the guards or audiences that may or not be inside the lodge or watching my performance.

In all, while the underlying mechanisms that work tirelessly to maintain social order within society are invisible, their intense weight crashes down on each and every person that exists within the social realm. While, in recent years, we have managed to stray ever-so-slightly away from these rigid confines toward a culture of gender fluidity and acceptance, women still carry a hefty burden in almost all contexts in which they exist. This exploration of social order through the intersection of Goffmanian theory and Bentham’s panopticon yields these underlying processes of order and control that dominate our social spheres, force self-regulation in adherence to socially acceptable attitudes, and ultimately, imprison us in our own personal panopticons. Hopefully, society will continue toward the gender fluid direction that which we are heading in the never-ending attempt to reclaim the extreme power that our audiences and prison guards alike possess over our lives.

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