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Allison Moore & Carlo Zuccarini

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Persons and Sexuality

Critical Issues

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The Transformations Hub
'Sexualities'



Persons and Sexuality

Edited by

Allison Moore and Carlo Zuccarini

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Foreword: Persons and Sexuality

Allison Moore and Carlo Zuccarini

The papers in this collection were presented at the Fifth Global Conference on *Persons and Sexuality*, which was held in Salzburg, Austria, from 3 to 5 November 2008. This eBook represents a ‘snap shot’ of the conference proceedings and the papers are reprinted here as they were presented at the conference. The eBook is divided into sections, which correspond to the form and structure of the conference and the diversity of the papers herein reflects the interdisciplinary nature of sexuality studies generally, and the *Persons and Sexuality* conference specifically. Despite the diversity of the papers in the volume, it is possible to identify a number of recurrent themes: identity and performance, visibility and invisibility, notions of legitimacy and illegitimacy, representations of sexuality, public and private, and the commodification of sexuality.

In PART I, the authors consider the ways in which representations of sexuality in society, generally, and in media, specifically, serve to reinforce hegemonic constructions of sexuality and gender. Maria Kyriakidou and Sotris Themistokleous offer a critical analysis of the representations of sex trafficking in Greek newspapers. Whilst they identify several discourses in newspaper reporting, ranging from political, economic and scientific to ‘everyday’ discourses, they suggest that dominant and recurrent discourse is one of individual ‘victimisation’, which not only prevents an exploration of the complex social, political and economic conditions within which trafficking occurs, but also denies women’s agency and limits possibilities of a collective response to trafficking. Drawing on Gramsci’s concept of cultural hegemony, they suggest that newspaper reports on trafficking should be seen in the context of the commodification of sexuality, whereby ‘sensationalised’ reports can be understood as ‘entertainment’ to ‘boost’ newspaper sales and readership. The commodification of sexuality is also a central theme in Neil Carr and Sarah Carr’s article on the history of sex shops in Dunedin, New Zealand. Using archive materials, they chart the development, presence and promotion of sex shops from the 1950s to the present day. Although there have been significant changes in the ways in which sex shops advertise and in the geographical spaces they occupy, they continue to be partially hidden or camouflaged, evident in their ambiguous names, their peripheral positions on the margins of the city or their shop front facades that disguise the true nature of the shop. They argue that despite an apparent liberalisation in attitudes towards sex and sexuality, this camouflaging reflects dominant, ‘schizophrenic’ attitudes that find sex exciting and enticing and simultaneously deviant and abhorrent.

PART II of the eBook focuses on the interface of faith, religion and sexuality. Sharon Bong explores the processes of ‘becoming’ and experiences of ‘personhood’ among GLBTQ (Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer) individuals in Malaysia and Singapore. She argues that coming out to self and others as non-heterosexual is neither linear nor unidirectional but, rather, is fragmented and fractured by ‘the cycle of affirmation and disapprobation’ by both family and church. Like Bong, Derrell Cox II’s paper explores the tensions between sexuality and spirituality for current or former evangelical Christians living in southwestern America. Whilst the evangelical Christian church promotes both compulsory heterosexuality and compulsory monosexuality, the interviewees in his study have transgressed the teachings of their church, choosing to live in non-monogamous and / or non-heterosexual relationships. His findings suggest that, although they experienced rejection and condemnation by their church, most of the interviewees in the study reported that exercising choice and freedom with regards to their sexuality was ‘spiritually rewarding’, leading to what he calls ‘sacred spirituality’. In a paper that demonstrates how theory can be translated into practice, Alexey S. Bulokhov provides an overview of the work of US based organisation *Soulforce Q Equality Ride*, which works with community activists to challenge schools, colleges and universities that discriminate against LGBT students and staff on the grounds of Christian doctrine. The organisation aims to raise awareness about the relationship between religious fundamentalism and homophobia / transphobia.

PART III turns to theoretical paradigms within which sex and sexuality have been conceptualised. Jürgen Schaupp examines the challenges to prevailing sexual norms that emerged amongst sex radicals in the United States at the turn of the twentieth century. Focusing specifically on the writings of Emma Goldson and Emil Rüdibusch he argues that whilst the sex radicals, whether communist, anarchist or individualist, were united in their critique of restrictive and oppressive sexual norms, there is considerable disagreement over the root and nature of that oppression and about the strategies needed for sexual reform. Robert Darrow uses a Foucauldian lens to critically analyse the life and work of Alfred Kinsey and argues that, although Kinsey is often hailed as sexually progressive, even liberatory, his work can be seen as regulatory and disciplinary, continuing to define and classify sexual behaviour.

Sexuality and Aesthetics are the focus of PART IV. Focusing on opera, Carlo Zuccarini draws on neuro-scientific research on the ‘reward system’ of the brain and also Lacanian psychoanalytical theory to posit a neuropsychanalytical approach to making sense of and understanding the ways in which opera is processed in the brain and the mind to produce an emotional response in the audience / listener.

Both papers in Part V, *Identities* consider the fluidity of sexual identities. Drawing on her research with female phone sex workers, Giulia Selmi suggests that identity is ‘something we do’, something that we perform. The women in her research negotiated their sexual / professional and private / public identities in ways that disrupted dominant and pathologising discourses of both sex work and female sexuality. Flavia Monceri also highlights the importance of performance, performativity and negotiation in the context of SM (somasochism) relationships. She argues that in SM, all aspects of a scene are open to negotiation, including gender and sexual identity. What is important in SM is the performance of a particular set of power relations but the process of negotiating how those power relations will be acted out has the potential to deconstruct, destabilise and disrupt power relations in wider society.

PART VI is concerned with *Ethics, Plurality and Responsibility*. Tom Claes explores the impact of globalisation on sexual ethics and considers the fact that, whilst globalisation opens up new possibilities with regards to sexuality, at the same time, it has led to greater inequalities. He suggests that the globalisation of sexuality has resulted in important moral and ethical questions, which continue to be addressed from a localised, socio-culturally specific view of sexual ethics and, therein, the local becomes universalised. Moore and Reynolds examine discourses underpinning the recent development in a number of Western European countries of criminalising the transmission of HIV. They argue that criminalisation serves to both reinforce dominant, dichotomous constructions of sexuality and reinforce and reproduce hegemonic heterosexuality through the ‘othering’ of people with HIV.

In PART VII, Benita de Robillard considers cultural constructions of sexuality through her analysis of contemporary South African bridal magazines. She maintains that these magazines are replete with representations of bourgeois, monogamous, heterosexual couplings but they forget about polygamy, which are practiced in South Africa and which, she argues, reflects underlying fears and anxieties about polygamous sexuality.

In the final section, *Renegotiating and Redefining*, Tina Schermer-Sellers’ paper focuses on sexual and relational discontent exploring the tensions experienced by couples who, due to the demands of work and family, find themselves with little time to connect sexually. This discontent, she suggests, is further compounded by the legacy of sexual repression, which leaves individuals with limited linguistic skills to articulate and negotiate their sexual needs.

The editors would like to extend their gratitude to all the authors who have contributed the thought-provoking and challenging papers that make up this volume. Thanks are also extended to everyone at Inter-

Disciplinary.net whose advice, guidance and support have been vital in the completion of this eBook.

PART I

Media and Representations

Media, Economics and Sexuality: An Approach to the Greek Press Reports on Trafficked Women

Maria Kyriakidou and Sotiris Themistokleous

Abstract

The proposed paper explores the ways in which Greek newspapers refer to the phenomenon of sex trafficking. These reports are often abundant with assumptions regarding migrant women who are designated as 'victims' that need to be saved and this stance can at times be more harmful than helpful for these women who find themselves in abusive conditions. Media illustrations and the use of dominant discourses regarding the 'victims' of trafficking, often accompanied by sexual imagery perfectly fitting the stereotypical view of a sex worker, ultimately perpetuate the exploitative situation and present an inconsistent attitude by many daily newspapers with wide circulation. Hence, our paper investigates the debate around the so-called 'victimisation' of trafficked women. The most recent relevant literature suggests that trafficked women ought to be considered as subjects of rights especially of those concerning citizenship. Finally, we will employ the Gramscian concept of cultural hegemony in an attempt to explain how media owners as part of the business-oriented economy and shapers of socio-political consciousness, ultimately contribute to the process of commodification of sexuality and promote cultural stereotypes around sex work even through their ostensibly disapproving reports on trafficking. In line with the aforementioned analysis, one should likewise tackle the structural economic problems of migrant women in their countries of origin such as the unequal distribution of wealth, unemployment and low wages and eventually the need for the fundamental transformation of the contemporary global nexus of economic liberalism.

Key Words: Media, sexuality, trafficking.

The study reviews most Greek newspapers of wide circulation and broad readership with diverse political affiliations (Left, Right and Centre) in an attempt to recognise consistencies in the relevant Greek press illustrations. Certain central, key themes in the sorts of issues preferred and the language used by each paper are noted. The national newspapers that were reviewed after 2000 are *Kathimerini* (right of centre), *Eleftheros Typos*, *Adesmeftos*, *Apogevmatini* (right wing), *Ta Nea* and *Eleftherotypia* (left of centre), *To Vima* (centre), *Rizospastis* and *Avgi* (left). The criteria for the selection of these papers was our wish to cover a wide range of the political spectrum but

also to have a substantial number of articles in electronic archives since our research was web-based.

Studies of the daily press via discourse analysis developed in the last few decades and aim to reveal the cultural processes through which social practices are conditioned and images and stereotypes are formed. Such analyses expose the communicative strategies of the media together with the types of presentation, selection or even manufacturing of the news. Interactive relations between the media and the public as well as a plurality of discourses ranging from the 'specific' (scientific, economic, political) to 'everyday' discourse are often recognised.

Similar trends in communicative discourse are traced in our material as well. The present survey recognised various, broadly defined, modes of reporting. In fact there are different kinds of 'specific' discourses that we encountered: one is political, packed with criticism and recommendations for further reaction, suggesting what should be done in order to change the present plight of trafficked women. Another type is broadly defined as scientific, one that is seemingly 'objective', that translates into purportedly impartial and hard-data-reporting regarding the issue and equally covers economic issues regarding the illegal profits from the business of trafficking.

On the other hand, there are plenty of articles written by the norms of an 'everyday' discourse; articles that aspire to evoke feelings of pity, compassion and sympathy towards the predicaments of the 'victims' of trafficking, reports with a rather personal touch which appeal to the emotions and women's individual stories with an emphasis on what appears to be the sensational side of journalism. Plus, there is an inescapable historical association between trafficking and prostitution¹ that is obvious both in the relevant literature and in the newspaper articles² under consideration. To exemplify the aforementioned statements we should present our findings in a more detailed manner.

The political approach articles tend to criticise recent governmental policies such as anti-trafficking legislation for being incomplete and erratic.³ Although all papers include critical articles, the degree of their criticism is often conditioned upon their political affiliation. The left of centre *Eleftherotypia* often reports on the difficulty police departments have in further dealing with trafficking victims since the relevant Service is understaffed.⁴

Similarly, the links between political turmoil in the Balkans, the presence of international armies (UN, NATO) and the flourishing of trafficking in women in the region are often pointed out: 'Prostitution industry by UN soldiers in the Balkans or 'The Kosovo of prostitution: an orgy of human trafficking under the 'auspices' of UN and NATO.'⁵ The communist daily *Rizospastis* clearly targets its criticism not only against the anti-trafficking policies of Greek governments that are judged as inadequate

but also against the international economic and ‘social reasons of sexual exploitation’. Even though it shares some features with the other papers (such as sporadic references to personal stories of ‘women-victims’ and to modern ‘slave markets’⁶) the emphasis here is, in a much greater number, on articles critical of capitalism and neo-liberalism in general.⁷

Another specific type of discourse, the so called ‘objective’, seemingly ‘scientific’ approach, is usually enriched with statistics, the ‘revealing language of numbers’⁸ as stated, to provide for an alleged systematic study of the phenomenon in Greece and abroad. In a characteristic article of this type, hard data from international institutions are employed to discuss trafficking in women, who are continuously called victims, very poor and poorly educated with family responsibilities and dependent children, women who are recruited in their ‘ignorance’ about trafficking networks. The emphasis on low education and ignorance are used as further indications of their supposedly ‘naivety’ or situational weakness. The solution suggested is usually based on stricter punishment for the traffickers, fight against corruption in the countries of origin and stricter visa and immigration control by the authorities. No further references to the potentials that these women have to find adequate work in their home country or even to their willingness to migrate. A sub-category of the scientific, the ‘economic’ approach, is also quite popular emphasizing the profiting aspect of the issue with front page titles such as: ‘The money involved is sex industry limiting up,’⁹ or ‘sex industry becomes the ‘heavy industry’ of Greece.’¹⁰

Nonetheless, the approach that greatly prevails in Greek press reports in all the newspapers under study is the everyday, personal, subjective genre. Personal stories,¹¹ women’s narratives and individual accounts are among the most frequent reports which often involve descriptions of personal tragedies in dramatic tones. If we are to look at the specific language used in emotional articles we find out that journalists use one that is rather informal and at times sensational: ‘on the road to the nightmare,’ ‘shivering details,’ ‘the double torture of her enslavement and trial,’ ‘the tortures of next door,’ ‘he locked me up and burned me with cigarettes’ or ‘modern slave markets.’¹² Such reports cauterise as ‘guilty parts’ the trafficker who tortures and threatens women, Greek customers who receive their services even though they know the extent of illegal trafficking or Greek police officers and other governmental officials who emerge, at times, as being corrupted and facilitating traffickers.¹³ In other words, international pimp networks or ‘gangs’¹⁴ and ‘unhesitating networks of white slavery’¹⁵ are accountable for such a misfortune. Girls ‘cheated’ and ‘entrapped in the nets of the traders’ and ‘gangs,’ ‘money laundering’ for the Russian mafia, the ‘epidemic of sexual exploitation of women,’ ‘promises’ for ‘innocent’ jobs to foreign women which are not kept, ‘corrupted police officers who were paid by the slave traders,’¹⁶ ‘shivering numbers that reminds us of the Middle Ages.’¹⁷

In addition to the melodramatic overtones, social and cultural stereotypes about women as victims (or even as ‘victimized twice’¹⁸) find their expression in many articles since women are termed as ‘vulnerable’ and ‘susceptible to exploitation.’¹⁹ The word ‘victim’ abounds in each of these reports becoming almost synonymous to these women. However, many articles combining all the above types of narrative are not absent either. A good example is titled: ‘600.000.000 Euros is the amount of money circulated in prostitution. Corruption in public services and organized crime’ and continues: ‘Illegal immigration. White slavery industry, multinational slave trading businesses, dirty money... thousands of vulnerable victims. Unspeakable... dramas.’²⁰

What we hope to make clear is that there are many consistencies in the way most Greek newspapers present the issue of trafficking to their readers. We also need to say that we have no intention to undermine the tragic realities and exploitation, which trafficked women have to endure. Our concern is vis-à-vis the continuing emphasis on the ‘crime and punishment’ scheme associated as it is with border control and migrant women’s deportation, which in most reports reduces the analysis of the socio-economic conditions in the countries of origin and the full coverage of the complexities in the international economic nexus that pushed these women out of their homes. In addition, the numerous personal accounts and narratives stressing each individual ‘victim’s’ ‘vulnerability’ and ‘helplessness’ disregard the latter’s major personal and psychological strength exhibited by their decision to take their lives in their hands and emigrate to another country despite the deplorable transport conditions. Moreover, we believe that the accent on individual suffering or salvation stories, eventually limits references on potential solutions based on group action and collective accomplishments not only associated as it is with the ‘victim’ image but also with class consciousness and struggle for change.

Divergences from the mainstream reporting style can be traced in just a few papers: In a few instances, *Eleftherotypia* provides analyses²¹ that include contemporary criticism towards victimization of trafficked women and assuming support for a human rights approach which appears to be preferred over the punitive one. A similar human rights approach is also manifested in the *Avgi*, a ‘daily paper of the Left’, closely linked to the leftist coalition party of SIRIZA; *Avgi* also includes critical reports on international and national anti-trafficking policies²² and follows, particularly in the last few years (from 2005 onwards), contemporary activist trends which seek an end to the repressive border control approach and to the violation of trafficked women’s human rights. Finally, the communist daily *Rizospastis* also attacks the punitive, anti-migration, border control approach to trafficking and promotes a viewpoint that blames the structural injustice of the current model of economic globalisation and its repercussions on the

economies and societies in the countries of origin. The communist party (and the newspaper consequently) equally take a negative stand towards the legalisation of prostitution maintaining that it is a blatant 'industrialisation of sexual life' in a society where 'everything can be sold and bought.'²³

To further explain our claims, we have to outline the debate around the so-called 'victimisation' of trafficked women and then turn to our theoretical starting point on Gramsci's notion of cultural hegemony. The most recent relevant literature suggests that sex trafficking should be viewed in the context of transnational migrant sex work and trafficked women ought to be considered as subjects of rights especially of those concerning citizenship.²⁴ It is true that hitherto anti-trafficking legislation at the national (individual states) or supranational (e.g. the EU) level mainly limits trafficking to a border control issue exhibiting a rather conservative, criminal approach which is often informed by an equally conservative, moral approach to prostitution as well. To limit trafficking in women, governments and NGOs promote solutions which rather deal with the consequences rather than the roots of the problem with more stringent border control, heavier punishments for traffickers who are viewed as the only guilty part in the crime, increased policing and surveillance, exclusionary policies and consequent criminalisation and stigmatisation of the women involved especially if they do not cooperate with the police in the persecution process of their traffickers.

Harsh policies on prostitution and strict border control are often associated with victimisation which in turn presumes an intrinsic 'naïveté' or 'febleness' and can reinforce these women's illustration as persons in need of 'salvation' by westerners who are implicitly recognised as 'smart' or 'powerful.'²⁵ The real challenge is to emphasise the importance of female agency and see them for what they really are, that is women who resist to their lives structural inequalities, wish to migrate, take control of, and change, their lives and in this process they suffer violations of their human rights. The fact that the increased policing approach cannot resolve or eliminate the problem becomes obvious when one considers the example of the Balkan states, where despite the introduction of relevant legal framework and increased funds made available for the combat of trafficking by the international community, there is no actual restraint to the problem.²⁶ To take the example of Bulgaria, for instance, it is clear that, as the director of a major NGO in this country admitted, the most important problem of Bulgarian women today is unemployment, especially for the ones who are between 18 and 25 years old. There is no much assistance that NGOs can offer in the fight against women's unemployment, other than a few ineffective seminars that teach women how to start their own business. The reason is that there is no western funding for this purpose since unemployment keeps wages low and attracts western investments.²⁷

To return to our particular case, the media which constitute parts of national and international print industries, for their best part provide the readers with often superficial, 'light' reports and cries related to trafficking in women and prostitution, deprived of in-depth analyses regarding the actual roots of the problem while, at the same time, try to boost their circulation through an imagery that directly feeds in already well established, objectifying images of femininity and sexuality that in their turn are positioned at the very origins of phenomena such as trafficking and prostitution. The illustrations that usually accompany the newspaper articles under study in a few instances project the image of the helpless victim, while in others, employ sexually explicit images that encourage a 'voyeurism' on the part of the readers thus weakening and invalidating the lamenting reports on trafficking on the associated texts.²⁸ The gaze of the spectator compliments that of the camera in photographs which constructs images of femininity and female sexuality and fantasizing desires and pleasures in a very limited way: the profit-seeking, market-oriented way. Within contemporary culture, overt or covert 'pornified' messages communicated throughout the print and electronic media are projected as sexually liberating and those who question this view are disregarded as being prudish.

Sexuality is an intrinsic and most intimate part of our humanity; the expressions of its liberation can be fulfilling and empowering. But sexual liberation bears no similarities to what we experience in today's raunchy culture, which is the result of capitalist commodification of sexuality. As Orr claimed '... capitalism, by turning sex into a commodity, makes parts of our humanity alien to us... raunch culture is sexual liberation through the prism of capitalism.'²⁹

To further elaborate, we resorted to theoretical tools drawn from Gramsci's view on hegemonic culture and Foucault's concept of bio-power. The latter is a new form of power associated with industrialization and related references to bio-politics could explain the communication techniques that construct and support cultural hegemony in the era of capitalism. Bio-power is relevant here since it is closely linked to sexuality and to the objectification, classification and assessment of sexual behaviours. Bio-power encourages narratives and discourse on sex but it eventually administers and regulates human sexuality into types, defining the ones that are accepted and those that are not.³⁰

This process is further linked to the imposition of a dominant hegemonic discourse on senses, needs, social relations and bodies through the media and communication networks. Newspapers are above all businesses and wish to sell and profit. Texts and imagery are both at the service of this goal. The desired outcome is for the newspapers to sell and for the hegemonic ideas about market, commodification and consumption patterns to

be perpetuated. To further elaborate on the hegemonic ideas, we need to clarify the notions of culture and cultural hegemony.

Culture for Gramsci is not static; the study of culture is a study of the power of ideology and how that affects and shapes conducts within society. It is divided in 'high' and 'popular' culture (folklore), which are representations of 'knowing' and 'feeling' respectively.³¹ High culture, a privilege for the intellectuals, refers to the political initiatives that will shape the view of the masses regarding the socio-economic environment that surrounds them. Popular culture or folklore embodies the 'common sense,' the fulfilment of a puzzle of various beliefs and ideas that create an artificial perception of a common worldview, which by no means is critical to the established hegemonic views.³² This 'common sense' is identified in individual and collective perceptions regarding what defines the social relations among citizens, what trends are in fashion and how to consume. In our specific case, one should notice the difference between the seemingly objective, 'scientific,' hard-data articles as high culture products and the personal accounts, every-day experiences and life stories as popular culture products. Media have been central to the expansion of ideas that actually serve their own interests as multinational companies as well. Especially in the political realm, media played a decisive role in shaping the public opinion and directing minds and hearts.³³

To further apply these views on media culture, it is widely accepted that in present times a global oligopoly, a globalised commercial media market, emerged.³⁴ To enter the media industry one has to have capital and consequently media owners have always been members of the economic elite. Profit-oriented media are 'very sensitive to advertiser, governmental and other powerful interest group desires, needs, and pressures... The biases of corporate advertisers... reinforce establishment positions and tend to marginalize dissent.'³⁵

In our specific example in Greece, there is a plethora of media outlets but the market is dominated by 'businessmen, ship-owners, construction and related interests... These companies... control approximately 90 per cent of the total media market in terms of audiences and advertising revenues.'³⁶ Media conglomerates have a profound impact on culture and ideas through their content. As giant businesses, they tend to favour the current socio-economic structure and unfavour any radical transformation in the market and property relations that could reduce the power and profits of their business. As McChesney put it: '...acting in their own self-interest, media conglomerates exist simply to make money by selling light escapist entertainment.'³⁷ We cannot ignore the fact that private media companies primarily serve the economic interests of their owners. So, even financially strong media fear the controversial, for they do not wish to

put these interests at stake. The stories coverage promoted is of those that are deemed more ‘acceptable and entertaining.’³⁸

Sensational reports on trafficking and prostitution can fall within this category of entertainment. As newspaper owners are increasingly concerned with their product’s circulation, the persistence of these types of reports accompanied by eye-catching photographs is unavoidable. For the members of the hegemonic elite, enduring commodification of every aspect of human life, including sexuality, is effective. The trafficking news under study ultimately feed into such commodification despite voices of criticism, which are also published mainly in the newspapers that can be termed as ‘quality’ press. The latter take their share of the market by reports that are often critical of the establishment (governmental policies on trafficking or corruption in the administration). This gives an impression of polyphony and presentation of alternative voices, which is necessary for a consumer democracy since it exploits all possible sources of consumption commercialising all kinds of socio-cultural experience. After all, the maintenance of social order and of hegemonic ideology is due to the ‘appropriation and negotiation of meaning.’³⁹

This is not to say that alternative media sources which are not based on media conglomerates do not exist or that are not active. However, this is also one of the parameters of the market-based system. The dissident press is allowed to operate but without the capacity to raise high circulation numbers. In our case in Greece, the party-supported newspapers on the Left (*Avgi* and *Rizospastis*) that do not fall under the definition of the profit-oriented businesses, even though they cannot be delineated as alternative or independent media, survive the strict market conditioning due to party associations and readership, a fact that explains their diverging positions. The rest of Greek press, almost in its entirety, addresses a wider and relatively diverse audience.

Notes

¹ M. Capous Desyllas, ‘Book Review: *Sex trafficking: The global market in women and children*. Kathryn Farr. 2005. New York: Worth Publishers. pp.262, ISBN:0-7167-5548-3, US \$24.95 (Paperback)’. *Journal of International Women’s Studies*, vol. 8, May 2007, p. 167.

² For an example see *Avgi*, ‘Mahi Kata Tis Porneias Kai Tis Somatemporias’, 01/08/1998.

³ For example, see *Ta Nea*, ‘Asydosia’, 08/08/2001 and *Eleftherotypia*, ‘Roz ‘Paradeisos’ EGINE I Ellada’, 22/3/2001.

⁴ *Eleftherotypia*, ‘Metopiki Me To Roz Doulemporio’, 24/11/2003 and ‘Athina: 20 Astynomikoi Stelexwnoun To Hthon!’, 03/04/2001.

⁵ *Eleftherotypia*, 'Viomihania Porneias Gia Kyanokranous Sta Valkania', 01/07/2002 and 'Kosovo Porneias', 07/05/2004.

⁶ All in *Rizospastis*, 'Anthei To Emporio Gynaikon', 17/08/1997, 'Katastaltiki Antimetopisi Tis Porneias', 13/12/2001, 'Paidoules Stin Porneia', 27/07/1997, 'Auxisi Tis Eisagomenis Porneias', 15/11/1998, 'Euxologia Ypeuthinon Gia Ta Thymata Tis Porneias', 15/05/2003 and 'Gynaikes Antistatheite!', 15/02/1995 respectively.

⁷ See for instance the article titled: 'The Porn Capitalism and White Slavery' in *Rizospastis*, 'O Pornos Kapitalismos Kai to Emporio Sarkos', 10/08/1999.

⁸ *To Vima*, '600.000.000 Euro o Tziros Tis Porneias', 10/03/2002.

⁹ *Kathimerini*, 'Sto Limit-Up o Etisios Tziros Tou Sex Stin Ellada', 26/01/2008. Similarly, *Eleftherotypia*, 'Tziros 6 dis. Euro Stin Porneia Eisagogis', 28/07/2002.

¹⁰ *Adesmeftos Typos*, 'Varia Viomihania To Paranomo Sex Stin Ellada', n.d., viewed on 15 October 2008, <<http://www.adesmeytos.gr/static/content.asp>>.

¹¹ See for instance *Avgi*, 'Vosnia. Anthei I Polypolitismiki Porneia', 14/04/2000.

¹² *Kathimerini*, 'Oi Drastes Stin Ellada Menoun Atimoritoi', 18/06/2006, *Eleftherotypia*, 'Miniaio Kerdos 5.000 Euro Gia Kathe Kormi', 06/12/2005, *Ta Nea*, 'Kamia Den Tha Glytosei', 3/12/2007, *Rizospastis*, 'Thanatos Sto Pagomeno Mpelles', 05/04/2000 and *Avgi*, 'Miso Ekatommyrio Gynaikes Sto Diktyo Somatemporias', 22/12/1998 respectively.

¹³ *Avgi*, 'Astynomikoi Enohoi Se Ypothesi Viasμου Kai Somatemporias Allodapon Anilikon', 04/12/2004.

¹⁴ *Ta Nea*, 'Psaxnoun Diplomates Sti Mafia Tis Visas', 18/12/2006 and 'Kamia Den Tha Glytosei', 3/12/2007, *Kathimerini*, 'I Arsi Aporritou Odigise Se Kykloma', 16/11/2006, 'Mia Polydiastati Ypothesi Mastropeias', 14/11/2006, 'Kykloma Mastropon Me Edra tin Tsexia', 28/11/2006, 'I Symmoriamia Ton Apagogeon', 03/08/2007, *Avgi*, 'Exarthrothike Diethnes Kykloma Trafficking', 30/11/2007 and 'Oi Dromoi Tis Porneias Pernoun Apo Tin Paranomia', 08/07/2001, *Rizospastis*, 'Sta Diktya Tis Exanagkastikis Porneias', 02/06/1996.

¹⁵ *Ethnos*, 'Somatemporoi Ekpaideuoun Gynaikes Prin Tis Vgaloun Stin Porneia', 04/05/2007.

¹⁶ All in *To Vima*, '600.000.000 Euro o Tziros Tis Porneias', 10/03/2002, 'Striptease Gia Dikigorou, Dikastikous Kai Astynomikous', 13/11/2005, 'Allodapes Sta Diktya Ton Kyklomaton Tis Somatemporias', 01/09/1996 and 'Astynomikoi Prostataean Roz Tilefona', 16/04/2006 respectively.

¹⁷ *Adesmeftos Typos*, 'Epixeirisi Somatemporias', 11/12/2002.

¹⁸ Once for being trafficked and once because the state does not enforce the relevant legislation and the guilty parts are not properly punished, see *Kathimerini*, ‘Somatemporoi: Katadikes Xwris Antikrisma’, 26/01/2008.

¹⁹ *Kathimerini*, ‘Allodapes Thymata Ekmetalleusis’, 04/07/2006.

²⁰ *To Vima*, ‘600.000.000 Euro o Tziros Tis Porneias’, 10/03/2002.

²¹ *Eleftherotypia*, ‘Dikaioma Stin Porneia?’, 10/6/2001 and ‘Eleftheri Agora Psyhon Kai Somaton’, 21/07/2002.

²² *Avgi*, ‘Stamatiste Ti Dioxi Ton Thymaton Trafficking’, 27/05/2005 and ‘To Kleisimo Ton Synoron Den Meionei Ta Thymata Tou Trafficking’, 06/12/2006.

²³ *Rizospastis*, ‘Nomimopoion Tin Porneia Gia Perissotera Kerdi’, 08/10/2003, ‘Auxisi Tis Eisagomenis Porneias’, 15/11/1998 and ‘Horis Na Logariazoun Tis Gynaikes’, 18/07/1999.

²⁴ M. Wijers and M. van Doorninck, ‘Only Rights Can Stop Wrongs: A Critical Assessment of Anti-trafficking Strategies’, Paper presented at EU/IOM STOP European Conference on Preventing and Combating Trafficking in Human Beings — A Global Challenge for the 21st Century, 18-20 September 2002, European Parliament, Brussels, Belgium, viewed on 15 October 2008, <<http://www.walnet.org/csis/papers/wijers-rights.html>>. Similarly, for a range of opinions in the same line, see also M. Lee (ed.), *Human Trafficking*, Willan Publishing, UK, 2007.

²⁵ Capous Desyllas, 2007, p. 171.

²⁶ J. Chuang, ‘Beyond a Snapshot: Preventing Human Trafficking in the Global Economy’. *Indiana Journal of Global Legal Studies*, vol. 13, Winter 2006, pp. 137-163 and G. Jahic and J. O. Finckenaue, ‘Representations and Misrepresentations of Human Trafficking’. *Trends in Organised Crime*, vol. 8, March 2005, pp. 24-40.

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²⁸ These are often stereotypical pictures of the ‘dangerous woman’ in contrast to the image of the victim and mostly associated with perceptions of prostitution as a moral threat; for such perceptions see L. Abatzi, *Proseggizontas to phaenomeno tou trafficking*, EKKE, Athens, 2006, pp. 32-39. To a great extent, they approximate the photographic conventions of soft-core pornography in terms of content, themes and narratives.

²⁹ J. Orr, *Sexism and the System. A Rebel’s Guide to Women’s Liberation*, Bookmarks Publications, London, 2007, pp. 47-48.

³⁰ M. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality. Vol. 1: The Will to Knowledge*, Penguin, London, 1998 [1976] and Abatzi, 2006, p. 38.

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- ³² M. Landy, 'Culture and politics in the work of Antonio Gramsci'. *Boundary 2*, vol.14, Spring 1986, pp. 49-70.
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- ³⁷ McChesney, 2004, p. 17.
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- ³⁹ The global capitalist manipulation of multiculturalism and 'neutralization' of revolutionary images, symbols and trends by the media are well exemplified in P. D. Murphy, 'Without Ideology? Rethinking Hegemony in the Age of Transnational Media', in *The Globalization of Corporate Media Hegemony*, L. Artz and Y. R. Kamalipour (eds.), State University of New York Press, Albany, NY, 2003, pp. 55-75.

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Selling Tantalisation and Titillation: A History of Camouflage

Neil Carr & Sarah Carr

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to chart, in a western context, the changing nature of sex shops in relation to shifting social values and morals. The need for this paper is related to the fact that whilst a substantial amount of work has been undertaken to understand the nature of the sex industry in terms of the physical provision of sex, little emphasis has been placed on understanding the sex shop and its position in society, especially outside of the context of the Internet. The material on which this paper is based was gathered via a content analysis of a variety of archives in Dunedin, New Zealand.

Overall, the paper shows that despite a veneer of liberalising social values, sex shops and their customers have generally been viewed as deviant from the 1950s to the present day. As a result, entrepreneurs have invented a variety of ways to hide sex shops in full view of the public to both access markets and ensure against the societal stigmatisation of customers. This 'hiding' began with the selling of tantalisation and titillation in sex shops with ambiguous facades situated in the urban fringe. The current camouflaging of the sex shop may be seen in the blurring of the divide between lingerie and sex shops, and the positioning of the sex shop as an educational outlet and aid to personal relationships.

Key Words: Sex shops, camouflage, moral values.

1. Introduction

A sex shop, for the purpose of this paper has been defined as a shop with a physical location as opposed to being a solely Internet based entity. It stocks products that are mainly, though not necessarily exclusively, of a sexual nature. These products may include videos/DVD's, magazines/books, sex toys, lingerie, and sex pills/potions. Such shops may, but do not necessarily have to define themselves as either a sex/adult entertainment/erotica shop. The definition of sex shops utilised in this paper does not include establishments where sexual acts may be purchased or live acts of a sexual nature are on offer.

Whilst a wide array of research has been conducted that has examined aspects of the adult entertainment industry such as prostitution, pornography, and sex clubs, relatively little research has been undertaken on the sex shop, especially outside of their growing presence on the Internet.¹

Consequently, little understanding of the social/moral position of sex shops within society has been developed.

One aspect that all research on the adult entertainment industry appears to agree on is that 'it seems fair to argue that within contemporary western societies, paying for sex is both a discreditable and a discrediting activity and those involved in selling sex, or indeed those involved in any aspect of the sex industry, are on the whole considered deviant.'² This is despite the fact that as Linnane notes, 'today many newsagents have shelves of soft-porn magazines on open display.'³ Notwithstanding its apparently deviant status the sex industry, in all its diversity, is a huge business that Americans alone spend an estimated US\$10 billion on annually.⁴ This highlights the ironic fact that whilst we may today live in a society saturated by sex and sexual innuendo which we often eagerly buy into we are at the same time repulsed by the notion of a sex industry. As Gini notes, 'We find sex both titillating and problematic. At one and the same time, says Laura Kipnis, we live in a culture that is 'hypersexual' and yet puritanical in its beliefs and mythologies regarding sex and the body.'⁵ As a result it has been suggested that sex shops have traditionally had to camouflage themselves to avoid social censure whilst providing sufficient marketing to entice in clients. For example, Malina and Schimdt note that 'The majority of the early sex shops [in the UK] operated on two fronts – overtly as bookshops displaying material of a titillating nature, which acted as a discreet cover for 'back-rooms' where hardcore material was available to a limited clientele.'⁶ Similarly, Ryder has stated that, 'Until recently, merchants [of sex products] could not (or would not) advertise or publicise their wares or location.'⁷

Based on the apparent disjuncture between the size of the demand for the sex industry and general societal views of participation as a client or provider in this industry as deviant this paper attempts to trace the history of the presence of sex shops in society. This is intended to offer both a commentary on sex shops and societal moral values and the changing nature of both.

2. Method

It is recognised that social/cultural values are geographically specific and that as a consequence the data collected to meet the aims of the research on which this paper is based also needed to be spatially specific.⁸ Consequently, the research is based in one location, namely Dunedin, the fifth largest city in New Zealand. Despite the geographically specific social values that regulate the moral climate within Dunedin it would be erroneous to say that it is either removed from the rest of the world or unique as social/cultural values overlap geographically.⁹ Consequently, whilst the results of this study may be specific to Dunedin, it is possible to extrapolate the general trends identified in the paper to a global context.

In order to meet the aims of the research on which this paper is based a variety of archival studies was undertaken. This included an examination of Yellow Page telephone directories between 2008 and 1960 to identify the existence and marketing of sex shops within Dunedin. A historical content analysis was also made of local newspapers from the early 20th Century to 2008 which aimed to identify public opinion about sex related issues in general and sex shops in particular. Furthermore, an analysis of local government records was undertaken to determine the nature of any laws governing the existence of sex shops in Dunedin and of any complaints to the public about these shops to the public authorities.

3. Social History of Dunedin and Sex in the City

Dunedin was established as a colony in 1848, under the auspices of the New Zealand Company and linked to the Free Church of Scotland. The original leaders of the Otago settlement adhered to the moral structures of the Church of Scotland, both Established and Free. As a result they brought with them from Scotland the structures for enforcing morality amongst the communicants of the Church. The formal system of social control within the Scottish churches was based on Calvinist dogma that charged the congregation with responsibility to maintain order and discipline.¹⁰ In conjunction with this social control, the settlement was founded along the systematic principles of Edward Gibbon Wakefield, which included ensuring a gender balance among settlers to avoid the vice and moral degradation that the old world and early American settlements faced.¹¹

The effectiveness of these founding systems of control was limited from the beginning. Only half of the original settlers were Presbyterian, and of those perhaps a half to two thirds were communicants of the Free Church and thus subject to its punishments.¹² The governance of the settlement was undertaken by an English/Anglican minority appointed by the Governor of New Zealand, and often at odds with the Presbyterian Church leaders. Those promoting the settlement had found it very difficult to find capitalists willing to emigrate, thus the population was almost entirely made up of the labouring class, and establishing a gender balance became impossible following the discovery of gold in the hinterland in 1861.¹³

The type of conservative morality preached by the Presbyterian settlers was still in evidence throughout much of the 1900s with a variety of articles featuring in the Otago Daily Times (ODT), the leading local newspaper, which discussed efforts to censor immoral literature/indecent publications. The moral stance in New Zealand regarding sex appeared to make a significant swing to the liberal side in 2003 when the government voted to legalise prostitution by one vote. The ODT featured a variety of articles commenting on the debate about whether to legalise prostitution that reflected all perspectives and suggested, as did the narrowness of the vote,

that New Zealand in general and Dunedin in particular had reached a somewhat schizophrenic state where conservative and liberal sexual moral values sat side by side. More recently the Otago Daily Times featured articles that hint at the continued emergence of a more liberal sexual moral attitude in Dunedin. For example, in an article dated 27th of January 2007 it was suggested 'explicit sex in films and books used to be shocking but there are signs of a new liberalism gaining ground.' Yet conservatism clearly persists as the same article also stated 'for all the sexualisation of our culture, we live in strangely repressed times.'

It is against the backdrop of historically conservative and more recently liberalizing moral values that sex shops in Dunedin have existed, seeking to advertise and sell their wares whilst avoiding social censure.

4. A History of Sex Shops in Dunedin

The presence of sex shops in Dunedin can be traced back to 1972 when Cupid Shop first opened its doors yet it was not until 1985 that Cupid Shop was the first sex shop to begin openly advertising its existence in the Yellow Pages.¹⁴ As shown in Table 1, in a clear example of camouflage the Yellow Pages positioned sex shops under the heading of 'Adult Education' in 1985 and 1986 before a new heading of 'Adult Shop' was inserted in the publication in 1987. Whilst the latter header may be said to be more accurate than the former it can still be argued to be a less than honest definition of the shops situated under it. As Table 1 shows, minus a brief foray into the market by Terra Products, Cupid Shop was the sole sex shop operating, or at least advertising, in Dunedin until the late 1990's when it was joined by The Exclusive Shop. One thing all three of these shops have in common is a tendency towards rather ambiguous names. This may be said to be another layer of camouflage.

Year	Sex Shop	Advertisement
2008	Peaches & Cream Mega Store	Over 10,000 items. Sex toys, DVDs, lingerie, magazines, vibrators, leather, male & female sex pills and massage oils and much, much more. Huge DVD selection at great prices. DVD's from \$10
2008	Jonna G	intimates for women + men. NZ's most popular intimate store. Designer lingerie, innovative and exclusive adult toys, romantic gifts, books, and much more... Party plan, mail order, free catalogue

2008	Cupid shop Dunedin	No description in advert
2008	Dunedin Adult Supplies	Adult Novelties, gifts, cards, videos, toys, magazines, DVD's and more
2007	Cupid Shop	Vibrators, DVD's, Magazines, Lingerie, Videos, Novelties
2007	Dunedin Adult Supplies	Adult Novelties, gifts, cards, videos, toys, magazines, DVD's and more
2006	Cupid Shop	Vibrators, DVD's, Magazines, Lingerie, Videos, Novelties.
2006	Dunedin Adult Supplies	Adult Novelties, gifts, cards, videos, toys, magazines, DVD's and more
2005	Cupid Shop	Vibrators, DVD's, Magazines, Lingerie, Videos, Novelties.
2005	Dunedin Adult Supplies	Adult Novelties, gifts, cards, videos, toys, magazines, DVD's and more
2004	Cupid Shop	Adult love toys, adult magazines, novelties, adult videos, DVD's, fun wear, cards
2004	The Exclusive Shop (Dunedin) Ltd	Adult novelties, gifts, cards, videos, toys, magazines, DVD's and more
2003	Cupid Shop - Novelty & Fun Stop	Adult love toys, adult magazines, novelties, adult videos, fun wear, cards
2003	The Exclusive Shop (Dunedin) Ltd	Novelties, gift cards, videos
2002	Cupid Shop – Novelty & Fun Stop	Adult love toys, adult magazines, novelties, adult videos, fun wear, cards
2002	The Exclusive Shop (Dunedin) Ltd	Novelties, gift cards, videos
2001	Cupid Shop – Novelty & Fun Stop	Adult love toys, adult magazines, novelties, adult videos, fun wear, cards. 'Come and look at our range – there's something for everyone'
2001	The Exclusive Shop (Dunedin) Ltd	Novelties, gift cards, videos
2000	Cupid Shop – Novelty & Fun Stop	Adult love toys, adult magazines, novelties, adult videos, fun wear, cards. 'Come and look at our range – there's something for everyone'
2000	The Exclusive Shop	No description in advert
1999	Cupid Shop – Novelty & Fun Stop	Adult love toys, adult magazines, novelties, adult videos, fun wear, cards. 'Come and look at our range – there's something for everyone'

1999	The Exclusive Shop	No description in advert
1998	Cupid Shop – Novelty & Fun Stop	Adult love toys, adult magazines, novelties, adult videos, fun wear, cards. ‘Come and look at our range – there’s something for everyone’
1998	The Exclusive Shop	No description in advert
1997	Cupid Shop – Novelty & Fun Stop	Adult love toys, adult magazines, novelties, adult videos, fun wear, cards. ‘Come and look at our range – there’s something for everyone’
1996	Cupid Shop – Novelty & Fun Stop	Adult love toys, adult magazines, novelties, adult videos, fun wear, cards. ‘Come and look at our range – there’s something for everyone’
1995	Cupid Shop – Novelty & Fun Stop	Adult love toys, adult literature, adult videos, fun wear, cards for all occasions. ‘Come and look at our range – there’s something for everyone’
1994	Cupid Shop – Novelty & Fun Stop	Adult love toys, adult literature, adult videos, adult lingerie, cards for all occasions. ‘Come and look at our range – there’s something for everyone’
1993	Cupid Shop – Novelty & Fun Stop	Adult love toys, adult literature, videos, exotic lingerie, party plan sales, cards for all occasions
1992	Cupid Shop – Novelty & Fun Stop	Adult love toys, adult literature, videos, exotic lingerie, party plan sales, cards for all occasions
1990	Cupid Shop – Novelty & Fun Stop	adult literature, videos, exotic lingerie, party plan sales
1989	Cupid Shop	No description in advert
1988	Cupid Shop	No description in advert
1987	Cupid Shop	No description in advert
1986	Cupid Shop	Specialists in adult books, manuals – magazines, exotic lingerie – adult aids & novelties
1986	Terra Products	No description in advert
1985	Cupid Shop	Specialists in adult books, manuals – magazines, exotic lingerie – adult aids & novelties

The opening of a sex shop and its subsequent marketing in Yellow Pages may be said to represent both a change towards more permissive social attitudes and a desire amongst certain segments of the population to drive public morality towards a more liberal position. The changing nature of the adverts noted in Table 1 also hints at this driving of change and reactions to changes in moral values as it shows sex shop adverts becoming more explicit over time. So, as of 1992 Cupid Shop began advertising its stock of 'adult love toys' for the first time. Yet, whilst pushing their sex-oriented wares in an apparently increasingly less camouflaged manner both Cupid Shop and The Exclusive Shop were firmly located on the fringes of the central shopping district of Dunedin, arguably well away from the eyes of those potentially sensitive to the sight of a sex shop on the High Street. It is important to recognize that there are no legal reasons behind the location of The Exclusive Shop and Cupid Shop. Arguably, the decision to situate the shops in areas of the city outside of the high street may have saved them from the creation of sex shop regulations. Indeed, in the case of York in the UK a planning officer stated that sex shop licensing in the city was only instigated in reaction to complaints about the positioning of a sex shop by members of the public. In comparison, according to officers of the Dunedin City Council there are no written records of complaints by the public about the existence of sex shops in the City, meaning there was of course never any reason for the Council to take action against them. Whilst the lack of complaints may suggest that Dunedin's citizenry were highly liberal this is questionable when set aside the reality of the camouflage behind which the sex shops in the city have traditionally hidden and the conservative values often voiced in the ODT. Rather, this lack suggests that camouflage techniques have been successful.

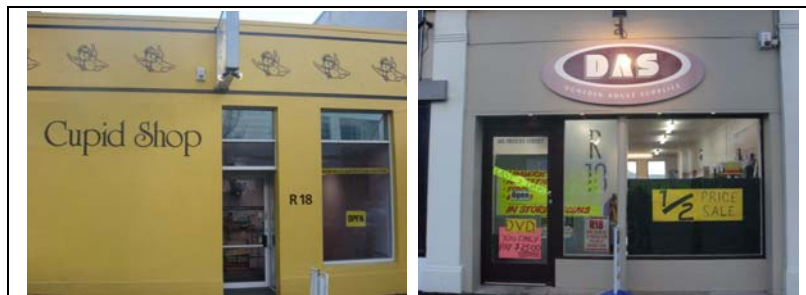


Figure 1. *Cupid Shop and The Exclusive Shop/Dunedin Adult Supplies facades*

In addition to the geographical position of Cupid Shop and The Exclusive Shop both shops have maintained an extremely neutral façade as

another form of camouflage. Figure 1 shows the front windows of both of these shops in 2008. Whilst no older photos of the two shops have been found it is reasonable to suggest that given the longevity of the shops in their current location and the standard nature of their adverts in the Yellow Pages over an extended period of time that the facades have altered little since the shops opened.

5. Sex Shops Today: Liberalisation and Desensitisation

At the same time as the presence of sexual titillation, arguably of an increasingly explicit nature, in the public eye has increased, Dunedin has witnessed a change towards more overt advertising by its traditional sex shops, as noted in Table 1.¹⁵ In 2005 The Exclusive Shop was renamed Dunedin Adult Supplies and in the same year Cupid Shop ceased advertising adult love toys and began advertising vibrators. In another sign of liberalization the 2008 version of Yellow Pages showed the arrival of two new sex shops in Dunedin. Yet whilst clearly being concerned with the supply of items of a sexual nature, as suggested by the pictures featured on the shop's website, Joanna G's stresses that they do not stock pornographic material. The attempt is clearly being made here to distance the store from the traditional images of sex shops as providers of morally questionable material. Instead Joanna G's focus is identified on the company website as follows; 'Romance, love & intimacy are 3 key ingredients for a healthy relationship. We hand pick and test our products to ensure they meet our quality & relationship enhancing standards. Take time to grow and enhance your relationship and above all have fun'.¹⁶ This camouflage deflects concerns about deviance by building an image of social responsibility; helping couples to maintain healthy relationships in an era of increasing divorce rates and separations. Joanna G's is also the first sex shop to position itself in the high street of Dunedin and, as seen in Figure 2, it has discarded the traditional façade of Cupid Shop and Dunedin Adult Supplies. Instead its shop front image suggests it is a lingerie store, which may be regarded as another kind of camouflage.



Figure 2. Hiding on the high street

In comparison to Joanna G's, Peaches & Cream which also advertised in Yellow Pages for the first time in 2008 is the least camouflaged of the four sex shops in Dunedin. Whilst the name of the shop is arguably still ambiguous and hence a type of camouflage, its advert in the Yellow Pages is the most sexually explicit and its shop façade, as seen in Figure 3, leaves the viewer in little doubt as to the nature of the shop. Arguably the only significant camouflage Peaches & Cream utilizes is the fact that it is not positioned on the High Street, though it is closer to this area than either Dunedin Adult Supplies or Cupid Shop.

Whilst the Dunedin City Council received no written complaints about the opening of Joanna G's they did, when asked, note that several members of the public had telephoned the council to complain though no further action was taken. Similarly, no news articles have been produced in the local Dunedin papers commenting on the existence and/or positioning of either Joanna G's, or any of the other sex shops currently operating in the city. This all suggests that Dunedin and its populace have a liberal view of sex shops which may be responsible for the diluting of the camouflage employed by the sex shops in the city in recent years. Alternatively, the creeping changes in the number and presentation of sex shops in Dunedin may have at least partially influenced any liberalization of moral attitudes in the city. A third alternative is of course that the camouflage has worked.



Figure 3. The upfront contemporary sex shop

6. Conclusion

In Western societies today there is clearly a huge demand for sex related products, which hints at a liberal moral attitude. Yet conservative Western social values also associate the purchasing and displaying of sexually oriented images and products as deviant. Dunedin is a clear example of these schizophrenic sexual moral attitudes and has been for some time. Within this context it is not surprising to see how sex shops have been created to meet the market demands and camouflaged in such a way as to deflect public criticism and potential censure from both themselves and their clients. This paper has shown how sex shops in Dunedin, arguably a 'typical' Western city, have and continue to utilise a variety of camouflage techniques including ambiguous names, tame adverts, bland facades, and locating themselves on the fringes of the high streets. Whilst the nature of the camouflage techniques have altered and more overt advertising policies have been engaged in camouflage continues to be utilised. The changes in the number of sex shops and their advertising and camouflage techniques are arguably a reaction to changing social values and an influence on social values. The camouflage techniques have, in terms of ensuring against public censure whilst allowing access to consumers clearly been a success.

Arguably, only when a shop such as Peaches & Cream can open on the high street, potentially with a more explicit name and a façade similar to its current nature without incurring any public sensor will it be possible to say that sex shops have been able to sell their tantalisation and titillation openly. Clearly as yet such a state of affairs does not exist.

There is a need to conduct further work in a variety of other locations to determine whether the patterns noted in Dunedin in this paper and the reasons behind them are similar elsewhere. In addition, there is a need to conduct interviews with the owners of sex shops to gain their views on how they market themselves to the public and whether they agree with the interpretations of the camouflage techniques noted in this paper. Whilst

necessary, such work may of course be difficult given the potential problems of accessing a small population and one, given its socially imposed deviant label may be unwilling to talk to ‘outsiders’. Furthermore, analysis of sex shop owners’ interpretation of their shops and the way they have been marketed to and positioned within society demands both a long-term continuity of ownership and an ability to recall historic marketing decisions and to do so in an unbiased manner.

Notes

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³ F. Linnane, *London the wicked city: A thousand years of vice in the capital*, Robson Books, London, 2003, p. 357.

⁴ A. Gini, *Why it’s hard to be good*, Routledge, New York, 2006.

⁵ Gini, p. 188.

⁶ D. Malina & R. Schmidt, ‘It’s business doing pleasure with you: Sh! A women’s sex shop case’, *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, 15 (7), 1997, p. 352.

⁷ A. Ryder, ‘The changing nature of adult entertainment districts: Between a rock and a hard place or going from strength to strength’, in *Cities of pleasure: Sex and the urban socialscape*, A. Collins (ed), Routledge, London, 2006, p. 38.

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¹⁰ Rosalind Mitchison and Leah Leneman, *Girls in Trouble: Sexuality and Social Control in Rural Scotland 1660-1780*, Scottish Cultural Press, Edinburgh, 1998, p. 5.

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¹² Rev. Thomas Burns, *Visitation Book of Reverend Thomas Burns 1848-1858*.

¹³ Ngaio Press, 'Passenger arrivals at Port Chalmers March 1848 – January 1851', 2006, viewed on 8 February 2008, <http://www.ngaiopress.com/drhocken.htm>, Colonial Secretary, *The Colony of New Zealand Blue Book*, Annual Returns for the Province of Otago 1861, 1862, 1863, 1864; Phillip Ross May, *The West Coast Gold Rushes* 2nd ed., Pegasus, Christchurch, 1967, pp 64-5.

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PART II

Faith and Religion

Sexualising Faith and Spiritualising Sexuality in Postcolonial Narratives of Same-Sex Intimacy

Sharon A Bong

Abstract

In this chapter, I aim to explore the ways in which ‘personhood’ is defined, lived out and transformed through the nexus of spirituality-sexuality of same-sex partnerships. The post-coloniality of these narratives (selected from 30 interviews) are attributed by GLBTQ (gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered and queer) bodies that are marked by differences that matter - sex, race, ethnicity, religion, class, sexuality - within the multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-religious contexts of Malaysia and Singapore (where these interviewees are based). The notion of personhood is an evolving process of becoming that is marked by orientations: that one is not naturally straight, gay or bisexual but becomes one. In the first section, I foreground the regulation of desire contained in the narratives of Dave (pseudonym), a twenty-something Christian gay man and the renunciation of desire of Bee (pseudonym), a thirty-something Christian gay man in becoming straight. They do so in compliance with ‘compulsory heterosexuality,’ the social privileging of being and behaving straight as oriented (i.e. marrying and procreating). I show how becoming straight, within the limits of ‘compulsory heterosexuality,’ serves as a rite of passage to becoming queer. In the second section, becoming queer for Dave and Bee is marked by the coming out to self and others as a succeeding rite of passage to becoming straight. Dave’s departure from a heterosexual union and Bee’s struggle to be a person in realising his desire to father as a gay man challenge the ‘heterosexual matrix’ that is premised on ‘compulsory heterosexuality.’ Postcolonial narratives of becoming that privilege familial and spiritual spaces (both home and the church) present distinct challenges for queer subjects inhabiting heteronormative spaces. Their evolving personhood in negotiating the tension between fully living out their sexuality and spirituality, potentially offers a re-visioning not only of sexuality in spirituality but also spirituality in sexuality.

Key Words: Same-sex partnerships, spirituality, postcolonial, Malaysia, Singapore, qualitative researching, queer phenomenology, heteronormativity, homonormativity, monosexism.

1. Aims and Impact of Research

The paper aims to explore the ways in which GLBTQ (gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered and queer) persons negotiate the tension between living out their sexuality and spirituality. Through a qualitative analysis of selected narratives of same-sex partners (based on interviews with 30 persons), I hope to show how personhood is defined, lived out and transformed through intimacy not only with one's self and partner but also one's spirituality within the nexus of same-sex partnership or intimacy.

The post-coloniality of these narratives are attributed by GLBTQ bodies that are marked by difference that matter - sex, race, ethnicity, religion, class, sexuality - within the multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-religious contexts of Malaysia and Singapore (where these interviewees are based). What then does becoming a person mean for GLBTQ persons in their 20s, 30s and 40s within religious (i.e. Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu and atheist) and cultural contexts (i.e. Chinese, Malay, Indian and Caucasian) that inhibit or prohibit that? Do their lived experiences merely challenge traditional and doctrinal prescriptions of heterosexuality and chastity in exemplifying 'deviant', 'sinful' and 'abnormal' life choices or do they potentially offer transformative ways of being and becoming?

2. Method and Methodology

Within the context of Malaysia and Singapore, researching on same-sex partnerships and spiritualities constitute sensitive topics. A 'sensitive topic' is defined as *'one that potentially poses for those involved a substantial threat, the emergence of which renders problematic for the researcher and/or researched the collection, holding, and/or dissemination of research data (sic).'*¹ It encompasses research which intrudes into the private sphere or delves into some deeply personal experience; where the study concerns deviance and control; where it is likely to impinge on the vested interests of the powerful or evoke the exercise of coercion (which does not preclude bodily harm) and where it deals with 'things sacred to those being studied that they do not wish profaned.'² And the investigation of how GLBTQs negotiate the tension between their sexuality and spirituality in same-sex partnerships in the context of Malaysia and Singapore, well qualifies as a 'sensitive topic', even a highly contentious one.

Data has been generated by in-depth, semi-structured, and audio-(digitally) recorded interviews with 30 persons from the GLBTQ community who are based in Malaysia and Singapore. Interviews in Malaysia were conducted from February to May 2007 and those in Singapore, February 2008. The criteria for sampling or selection of interviewees is heterogeneous in terms of their multi-religious, multi-cultural, and multi-ethnic backgrounds yet homogenous in terms of their being in same-sex partnerships who in their everyday realities negotiate the tension between their sexuality and

spirituality. The criteria of exclusion for interviewees would therefore be heterosexual adults below 21 years of age who are either non-Asian or not residing in Southeast Asia because the cultural context of Asia presents its own unique challenges to living out same-sex partnerships.

Snowball sampling had commenced in January 2007 with the call for interviewees posted in e-networks for gay, lesbian, bisexual, transsexual and transgendered persons in accordance with the respect to privacy as prescribed by the Standing Committee on Ethics in Research Involving Humans at Monash University. The definition of partnership or union is fluid: it is not based on number of years together, on whether or not the union has been solemnized or legalised, if same-sex partners have the intention to marry or to have children. It is a partnership if they deem it to be one. These constitute ethics in qualitative researching as interviewees participate in meaning-making in the research because they are its stakeholders. Member checking was also conducted where interviewees were asked to vet interview transcripts with a view to add, delete or refine what was communicated during the interview. All names used are pseudonyms.

In total, 30 persons, 22 from Malaysia and eight from Singapore had been interviewed (in-depth, face-to-face, audio-recorded interviewing). The interviewees were asked: a) how do you experience your partnership in relation to your faith; and b) how do you experience your faith in relation to your relationship. The basis of my sampling similarly approximates (in not fully representing) a cross-section of this heterogeneity that is the hallmark of the multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-religious realities of Malaysia and Singapore. Identities as such are 'multiple, contradictory, fragmented, incoherent, disciplinary, disunified, unstable, fluid.'³ The proliferation of identity markers in relation to ethnicity (understood as synonymous with cultures in the context of Malaysia and Singapore) and religions among the 30 interviewees are: Malay-Muslim (three), Chinese-Christian (14); Chinese-Buddhist (nine), Chinese-non-believer (two), Hindu mystic (intersex and lesbian) and Chinese-New Age spiritualist (transgendered). Among the 30 individuals are two parents (with children from previous heterosexual marriages); a bisexual woman and a transgendered person (female-to-male transsexual). As 'desiring subjects (i.e. the creation of identities based on desire)',⁴ their bodies, sexualities and lives are sites of contestation where the tensions between their sexualities and spiritualities intersect and are played out.

In considering the conference theme on 'Persons and Sexuality: Probing the Boundaries', the notion of personhood is an evolving process of becoming that is marked by orientations: that one is not naturally straight, gay or bisexual but becomes one.⁵ In the first section, I foreground the regulation of desire contained in the narratives of Dave, a twenty-something Christian gay man and the renunciation of desire of Bee, a thirty-something

Christian gay man in becoming straight. They do so in compliance with ‘compulsory heterosexuality,’⁶ the social privileging of being and behaving straight as oriented (i.e. marrying and procreating). I show how becoming straight, within the limits of ‘compulsory heterosexuality’, serves as a rite of passage to becoming queer. In the second section, becoming queer for Dave and Bee is marked by the coming out to self and others as a succeeding rite of passage to becoming straight. Dave’s departure from a heterosexual union and Bee’s struggle to be a person in realising his desire to father as a gay man challenge the ‘heterosexual matrix’, premised on ‘compulsory heterosexuality’, which is ‘the grid of cultural intelligibility through which bodies, genders, and desires are naturalised.’⁷ Postcolonial narratives of becoming that privilege familial and spiritual spaces (both home and the church) present distinct challenges for queer subjects inhabiting heteronormative spaces. Their resistance to the ‘politics of the straight line’⁸ potentially offer a re-visioning not only of sexuality in spirituality but also spirituality in sexuality.

3. Becoming Straight

In conceptualising a ‘queer phenomenology’ Ahmed posits that ‘straightness [is] about becoming rather than being.’⁹ Heterosexuality is de-naturalised as a pre-discursive and immutable given: it is an orientation. In doing so, she destabilises the binary opposition of heterosexuality/homosexuality in de-privileging heterosexuality as the centre around which queer sexualities are off-centred or marginalised. This makes visible how heterosexuality has come to be not only naturalised but also made compulsory through rewards for compliance and sanctions against non-compliance. That ‘[one] is not born, but becomes straight’ in paraphrasing Simone de Beauvoir,¹⁰ dismantles to some extent, ‘compulsory heterosexuality.’¹¹

Becoming sexually oriented as straight, ‘means not only that we have to turn toward the objects given to us by heterosexual culture’, as Ahmed adds, ‘but also that we must turn away from objects that take us off this line.’¹² In being born male/female and gendered masculine/feminine, one is imagined to be desirous of the opposite sex. As becoming straight is a sexual orientation (not a natural state of being), one is not naturally desirous of the opposite sex but learns to be in reaping the rewards for compliance or eschewing the sanctions against non-compliance of ‘compulsory heterosexuality.’¹³ One thus forecloses the possibility of being desirous of the same sex in adhering to this ‘compulsory order of sex/gender/desire.’¹⁴ To become a heterosexual subject constitutes both a turning toward heterosexual objects of desire and concomitant turning away from homosexual objects of desire. The former falls within the ‘field of heterosexual objects’ whilst the latter, falls outside it.¹⁵ As such, ‘heterosexuality’ as Ahmed says: ‘becomes a

field, a space that gives ground to, or even grounds, heterosexual action through the renunciation of what it is not, and also by the production of what it is.¹⁶

‘Sexual orientations’ as Ahmed adds, in developing Butler’s notion of gender performativity, ‘are also performative: in directing one’s desire toward some others, and not other others, bodies in turn acquire their shapes.’¹⁷ One is not born straight but becomes straight through the repetitive acts of sustaining the foreclosure of being attracted to homosexual or same-sex objects. The queer subject inhabiting the heteronormative space of a ‘straight culture’, sometimes masks his/her desire for homosexual or same-sex objects to avoid being ‘made socially present as a deviant.’¹⁸ The queer subject becomes straight by opting for the ‘straight path’ (through the discipline of desire) and celibacy (through the repression of desire). To illustrate, Dave, a 20-something Christian gay man says:

I kept telling myself, eventually I would become normal. And go back down the straight path...it was very normal for people to kind of like condemn [smiles] people who act...a bit sissy...girly. And so like I joined the ranks-lah, in a sense like maybe I was trying to hide...closeted gays... but inside of me, I would still like look at this classmate (in an all boys’ school) in a certain way... And to kind of like put up that front, I tried to like, date girls, I mean date people...of the opposite sex...To my friends, I’m straight, I’m normal. We would talk about girls. But in private I like hooking up with other guys.

Dave, as a queer subject, becomes straight in ‘[turning] toward the objects given to [him] by heterosexual culture’¹⁹ by trying to ‘like [and] date...people...of the opposite sex’. In becoming straight, he makes visible his compliance with the ‘straight culture’ by ‘joining the ranks’ which includes ‘[condemning] people who act...a bit sissy...girly’ in order to reap the rewards of being ‘normal’. The rite of passage in becoming straight however, is disrupted by his inability to effect the concomitant ‘[turning] away from objects that take [him] off this line,’²⁰ by concurrently and ‘in private...hooking up with other guys’. The self-pressure to sustain these repetitive acts of normalcy within the regime of ‘compulsory heterosexuality,’²¹ leads Dave towards self-deception where he ‘kept telling [himself that] eventually [he] would become normal [i.e. straight]’. The discipline of desire (for homosexual objects) is an effect of his becoming straight. As sexual orientations are ‘performative,’²² Dave in ‘[putting] up that front’ becomes, for some time and with family and friends, a straight man.

The regulation of desire contained in Dave's narrative in becoming and passing as a straight man, over-extends to the repression of desire, as an effect of Bee's 'not accepting who [he] was'. 'My spiritual, my sexual journey,' he says, 'it was veering more towards just being a straight person...and if in the event I have to live myself as celibate then, so be it'. Bee's preparedness to be celibate, of 'going the whole hog, that painful way' in becoming straight is a renunciation not only of homosexual objects but also heterosexual objects. In '[turning] away from (homosexual) objects that take [him] off this line' as well as *not* '[turning] toward the object given to [him] by heterosexual culture,'²³ Bee fails to become straight. He forecloses the possibility of both heterosexuality and homosexuality.

4. **Becoming Queer**

Becoming straight is paradoxically a rite of passage to becoming queer. In the previous section as illustrated, Dave and Bee, as queer subjects become straight by opting for the 'straight path' (through the discipline of desire) and celibacy (through the repression of desire), respectively. The 'failed orientation'²⁴ is made apparent in Dave's insistence however furtive, of turning toward the objects that 'take [him] off this line'²⁵ in being born male, gendered masculine and desirous of men. In attempting to 'turn toward the objects given to [him] by heterosexual culture,'²⁶ which materialised into a five-year relationship with a female college mate, Dave destabilises not only 'compulsory heterosexuality'²⁷ but also 'compulsory monosexuality' or 'monosexism', which is 'the social ideology that demands of individuals a singular sexual object choice.'²⁸ In the case of Bee, his embrace of celibacy in surrendering his sexuality to God ('then, so be it'), is also disorientating in not being contained by 'compulsory heterosexuality' and 'compulsory monosexuality.' Where sexual orientation is constituted by what it is as well as what it is not within a heterosexual/homosexual binary, both Dave and Bee un-become straight: they become queer.

Becoming sexually oriented as queer, in reversal, 'means not only that we have to turn [away from] the objects given to us by heterosexual culture,' to rephrase Ahmed, 'but also that we must turn [toward] objects that take us off this line.'²⁹ As becoming queer is a sexual orientation (not a natural state of being by extension of the same argument), queer subjects wean himself/herself off the rewards for compliance and confront the sanctions against non-compliance to 'compulsory heterosexuality.'³⁰ He/she thus forecloses the possibility of being desirous of the opposite sex in departing from the 'compulsory order of sex/gender/desire.'³¹ In being born male/female and gendered masculine/feminine, one *becomes* desirous of the same sex. As such, homosexuality, to once again rephrase Ahmed: 'becomes a field, a space that gives ground to, or even grounds, [homosexual] action through the renunciation of what it is not, and also by the production of what

it is.³² To become a queer subject constitutes both a turning toward homosexual objects of desire and concomitant turning away from heterosexual objects of desire.

Becoming queer for Dave is opting for the queer path through the de-regulation of desire. As Ahmed says: the 'temporality of orientation reminds us that orientations are effects of what we tend toward, where the 'towards' marks a space and time that is almost, but not quite, available in the present.'³³ Dave in coming out to himself says, 'I totally like came clean with myself: that I'm going down this path and there's no turning back...I'm putting the whole past behind me... I just couldn't see myself doing that anymore'. In substituting duplicity (in 'living a double life' as he terms it elsewhere in the interview) for transparency (in '[coming] clean with [himself]' and breaking up with his five-year girlfriend out of respect for both their personhood), he becomes queer. And becoming queer is an effect of what he '[tends] toward' in 'going down this path' that deviates from the straight path and is irreversible as there is 'no turning back' for him, particularly where his family and friends are concerned. The 'temporality of orientation', as Ahmed puts it, is evident in Dave's becoming queer paradoxically through becoming straight. Where he had disrupted his becoming straight by '[tending] toward' both heterosexual and homosexual objects in his 'past', he further departs from becoming straight by making visible his queerness in public/private spaces. Where he was almost straight but not quite, he now becomes queer.

The 'temporality of orientation' for Bee lies in his self-initiated transition from the repression of desire (celibacy) to its celebration, as he says:

Basically I had already decided that's the life that I wanted because I did live that life you know, of being a straight person struggling with my faults...but not succumbing to it physically...But you know, deep down inside, I still knew that I wanted to be with a man but I just didn't allow it-lah.

Becoming queer for Bee is tantamount to his realisation of his 'deep' desire 'to be with a man', in '[allowing] it' to mature as it has in the form of his exclusive eight-year relationship with his present partner. Where he had derailed his becoming straight by not '[tending] toward' both heterosexual and homosexual objects, through the option of being celibate, he further departs from becoming straight by '[turning toward] objects that take [him] off [the straight] line.'³⁴ That 'orientations are effects of what we tend toward, where the 'towards' marks a space and time that is almost, but not quite, available in the present,³⁵ is manifest in the narratives of both Dave and Bee. Coming out to self and others mark a distinct temporal and spatial

shift that differentiates their becoming straight there and then towards becoming queer here and now.

The seeming linearity of the 'temporality of orientation' that finds clear expression in coming out narratives, is tempered by the continuing cycle of affirmation and disapproval particularly from familial spaces: both secular (home) and sacred (church). The queer subject inhabiting the heteronormative space of a 'straight culture', makes visible his/her desire for homosexual or same-sex objects and risks vulnerability in being 'made socially present as a deviant'.³⁶ For Bee, inhabiting the 'straight culture' within his church has meant having endured the exorcism of the demon of homosexuality from him in being 'born of Satan' as a gay man. He was not only made a social deviant but also a spiritual one. Although he yearns to be part of a faith community, his spiritual journey paralleled by his becoming queer, has become one that he '[takes] with God alone'.

Inhabiting the 'straight culture' within his home, has meant being 'blessed' in having aunts that 'defended' him, in respecting the decision (to become gay) that he had chosen for himself 'whether it's right or wrong in the eyes of the church'. It is also in rising above anger and resentment at 'knowing that [he was] not loved as much as [his] siblings' by his grandfathers because he was 'slightly different, a little bit more effeminate' that in becoming queer, would potentially compromise family name, face and honour. As Bee recollects:

So I felt like I had to fight and work very hard for everything that I have or am which is, I think, on hindsight to me, it was a great thing because it really developed me as a person. And so you know, really there are no regrets. I mean in terms of anger and stuff, I think I've dealt with all of that. So it's something that's in the past...and I don't look at it as scars. I look at them as just building blocks.

Thus coming out as queer and coming into your own person, particularly in an Asian context, entails a sustained and imaginative resistance to familial pressure for queer subjects not only to inhabit heteronormativity but also to reproduce it. As Ahmed says:

Considering the politics of the straight line helps us rethink the relationship between inheritance (the lines that are given as our point of arrival into familial and social space) and reproduction (the demand that we return the gift of the line by extending that line).³⁷

Bee, '[reconsiders] the politics of the straight line' in '[rethinking] the relationship between inheritance and reproduction' by not looking upon his grandparents' disparagement of him as 'scars' that inhibit his personhood but rather as 'building blocks' that in honing his entrepreneurial skills (in building his own business), has 'developed [him] as a person', one who is emotionally and spiritually resilient. He further extends the 'relationship between inheritance and reproduction' by desiring 'to one day have [his] own family' in recognising his capacity and yearning (and that of his partner's) to mentor and father through adopting a child 'because of [their] nurturing ways' and give back where they have received God's blessings in abundance. In doing so, he 'returns the gift of the line' not by 'extending that line,'³⁸ i.e. heterosexual union with sex for procreative ends but by queering it through 'life experiments' of doing family differently.³⁹

Where the resistance of families is compounded by the limits of religious tolerance that loves the sinner but hates the sin, persons like Bee who queer 'the straight line' in redefining the 'relationship between inheritance and reproduction,' challenge the church to love not only the sinner but also the 'sin' with the moral and political imperative to love and love unconditionally.⁴⁰ In doing so, we realise the potential of religion - Christianity where these postcolonial narratives are concerned - becoming the 'ground of sexual freedom, rather than the *justification* for sexual regulation.'⁴¹

5. Conclusion

On the one hand, personhood is constituted by orientations: one is not born straight or queer but becomes one. The tension between containment and liberation from orientations for queer subjects like Dave and Bee, Christian gay men, are evident in their lived experiences that are privileged in this paper. Through a qualitative analysis of their narratives – in building theory from data - becoming straight within the hegemony of a 'straight culture,' serves as a rite of passage to becoming queer. Coming into one's own - the discipline, repression even renunciation of desire to its de-regulation, realisation and celebration - is ritualised by a coming out to self and others that characteristically demarcates the past from the present and future. The seeming linearity of this process is countered by the cycle of affirmation and disapprobation received from familial spaces, both secular (home) and sacred (church). Within the spiritual-sexual nexus of these postcolonial narratives, the Western discourse of constructing 'being-closeted-to-being-out as a one-dimensional trajectory' is problematised as it often discounts mitigating factors such as respect for parents and the need to maintain family name and honour.⁴²

On the other hand, personhood is constituted by orientations but is not contained by it. As shown, becoming straight for Dave and Bee 'means

not only that [they] have to turn toward the objects given to [them] by heterosexual culture but also that [they] must turn away from objects that take [them] off this line.⁴³ Through this effect of becoming straight within heteronormativity, the routinisation and naturalisation of heterosexuality, orientations are defined by the sex of one's (sexual) partners. Orientations within monosexism or 'compulsory monosexuality'⁴⁴ need to be problematised, as personhood is not merely contained by either heterosexual or homosexual 'objects' that one turns toward or away from. In this sense, 'homonormativity' is as problematic as it is also an extension of monosexism.⁴⁵ The radical potential to destabilise 'compulsory monosexuality' is manifest in Dave's passing as straight where he turns toward both heterosexual and homosexual objects and Bee's opting for celibacy where he turns away from both heterosexual and homosexual objects. In doing so, they show how one does not quite arrive at becoming and that whilst unsettling, this process potentially offers transformative ways of becoming persons and doing families.

Notes

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² *ibid.*, p. 6.

³ J Gamson, 'Sexualities, Queer Theory, and Qualitative Research' in NK Denzin and YS Lincoln (eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 2nd edn, Sage, Thousand Oaks, London and New Delhi, 2000, p. 356.

⁴ N Giffney, 'Denormatising Queer Theory: More Than (Simply) Lesbian and Gay Studies', *Feminist Theory*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2004, p. 74.

⁵ S Ahmed, 'Orientations: Toward a Queer Phenomenology', *GLQ* (Gay Lesbian Quarterly), vol. 12, no. 4, 2006, pp. 543-574.

⁶ Adrienne Rich quoted in R Dyer, 'Heterosexuality' in A Medhurst and SR Munt (eds.), *Lesbian and Gay Studies: A Critical Introduction*, Cassell, London and Washington, 1997, p. 267.

⁷ J Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Routledge, New York and London, 1990, p. 151.

⁸ Ahmed, *op. cit.*, p. 555.

⁹ *ibid.*, p. 553.

¹⁰ *ibid.*

¹¹ Dyer, *op. cit.*, p. 267.

¹² Ahmed, *op. cit.*, p. 554.

¹³ Dyer, *op. cit.*, p. 267.

¹⁴ Butler, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

¹⁵ Ahmed, *op. cit.*, p. 557.

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- ¹⁶ *ibid.*, p. 558.
- ¹⁷ *ibid.*, p. 557.
- ¹⁸ *ibid.*, p. 554.
- ¹⁹ *ibid.*
- ²⁰ *ibid.*
- ²¹ Dyer, *op. cit.*, p. 267.
- ²² Ahmed, *op. cit.*, p. 557.
- ²³ *ibid.*, p. 554.
- ²⁴ *ibid.*, p. 560.
- ²⁵ *ibid.*, p. 554.
- ²⁶ *ibid.*
- ²⁷ Dyer, *op. cit.*, p. 267.
- ²⁸ C James, 'Denying Complexity: The Dismissal and Appropriation of Bisexuality in Queer, Lesbian and Gay Theory' in B Beemyn and M Eliason (eds.), *Queer Studies: A Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Anthology*, New York University Press, New York and London, 1996, p. 220.
- ²⁹ Ahmed, *op. cit.*, p. 554.
- ³⁰ Dyer, *op. cit.*, p. 267.
- ³¹ Butler, *op. cit.*, p. 6.
- ³² Ahmed, *op. cit.*, p. 558.
- ³³ *ibid.*, p. 554.
- ³⁴ *ibid.*
- ³⁵ *ibid.*
- ³⁶ *ibid.*
- ³⁷ *ibid.*, p. 555.
- ³⁸ *ibid.*
- ³⁹ J Weeks, B Heaphy and C Donovan (eds.), *Same Sex Intimacies: Families of Choice and Other Life Experiments*, Routledge, London, 2001.
- ⁴⁰ JR Jakobsen and A Pelligrini, *Love the Sin: Sexual Regulation and the Limits of Religious Tolerance*, Beacon Press, Boston, 2004.
- ⁴¹ *ibid.*, p. 16.
- ⁴² A Yip, 'Religion and the Politics of Spirituality/Sexuality: Reflections on Researching British Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Christians and Muslims', *Fieldwork in Religion*, vol. 1, no. 3, 2005, p. 285.
- ⁴³ Ahmed, *op. cit.*, p. 554.
- ⁴⁴ James, *op. cit.*, p. 220.
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Claiming Marginal Sexual Identity within Mainstream Religious Culture: Soulforce Q Equality Ride Case Study

Alexey S. Bulokhov

Abstract

Over two hundred schools, colleges and universities in the United States discriminate against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) students, faculty and staff. These academic institutions operate under Christian denominational patronage or within particular religious heritage. Under the banner of religious freedom, they establish one's sexual orientation, gender identity and possible expressions thereof as qualifiers for access to education and employment.

Since 2006, the Soulforce Q Equality Ride empowers activists to engage conservative communities in dialogue about theological and practical implications of affirmation or condemnation of LGBT people. School policies reveal a complex view of homosexuality, often banned alongside conceptually and logistically diverse transgressions including rape, bestiality, theft, pornography, witchcraft and feminism. The crux of the struggle rests the opposing assertions of homosexuality as a holistic personal identity versus a set of behavioural lifestyle choices, often based on Scriptural interpretations.

To date the Ride has visited over fifty communities. Sometimes these interactions result in policy changes. Sometimes they lead to arrest for nonviolence civil disobedience. This is a case study in what happens when conflicting ideas about sexual orientation, gender identity, faith and justice collide during the Soulforce Q Equality Ride.

Key Words: homosexuality, Christianity, activism, civil disobedience, higher education, Scripture, Soulforce, Equality Ride, Brigham Young University, social justice.

There are over two hundred schools, colleges and universities in the United States of America which bar lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) students, faculty and staff from equal participation and/or terminate their enrolment or contract if their sexual identity is disclosed or discovered. All these academic institutions operate under direct Christian denominational patronage or within their religious heritage and base policies in question on their interpretation of Scriptural prescriptions for human sexuality. Under the Constitutional guarantee of religious freedom, they not only establish sexual orientation and gender identity as qualifiers for access to education and

employment, but assign negative moral and social value to marginal sexual identity (any variation from sysgendered heterosexuality). Since 2006, the annual Soulforce Q Equality Ride (SQER) engages these communities in dialogue about theological and practical implications of affirmation or rejection of LGBT people. In this process of re/claiming, discourse and interactions focus on physical and symbolic use of space and text.

Soulforce is a non-profit organization whose mission is freedom for LGBT people from religious and political oppression through the practice of relentless non-violent resistance. Since 1998 it consistently attempts to inform the general public of the connection between religious fundamentalism, homophobia/transphobia and the attacks on the lives and civil liberties of LGBT people. By engaging directly with what/whoever it identifies as the source of misinformation, Soulforce intends to hold religious institutions and leaders accountable for their rhetoric and practices while seeking opportunities for dialogue and reconciliation at the intersection of faith, sexuality, gender identity and social justice. To date, it has primarily engaged the issue within the Judeo-Christian context which is most prevalent in the USA. Since 2006 Soulforce Q is the young adult division of Soulforce.

According to SQER's co-founder Jacob Reitan, the project originated in 2005 as a response to a bar encounter with a gay student from Wheaton College, conservative Evangelical school outside of Chicago. When asked what it was like to be gay there, the student revealed that his sexual identity was not known to his peers and mentors as it violated Wheaton policy. Reitan, who identifies as a gay Lutheran, expressed surprise and disapproval. The student then defended such policy reiterating belief that homosexuality was sinful and had no place on campus. This instance suggested to Reitan that the compartmentalization of LGBT identity as demanded by confluence of spaces (chapel-dormitory-bar) and texts (Scripture-institutional policy-private thought) needed to be renegotiated into a more holistic worldview. The first SQER took place in March and April of 2006.

SQER claims marginal sexual identity within mainstream religious culture in the following format. Each year Soulforce Q identifies a list of institutions on the basis of their explicit policies regarding sexual orientation, gender identity, and/or expressions thereof as well as implicit campus culture surrounding these issues as evidenced by documented instances of verbal and/or physical abuse perpetuated by and/or against members of these institutions. The administration of those schools is contacted several months in advance with an offer to host a SQER visit to hold a conference-style series of events including academic presentations, panels, film screenings, thematic exhibitions and informal gatherings. While the range of SQER topics and concerns as well as organizational language and participant pool include those who identify as transgender, genderqueer and otherwise

gender-nonconforming, the SQER conversational focus to date has been on gay, lesbian and bisexual identity.

Initial school responses vary from affirmative to negative to silent. In the meantime, SQER participants (ages 18-30), known as Equality Riders, are selected in open competition and trained in philosophy and methodology of non-violence, Scripture studies, antiracism, grassroots organizing and other relevant topics. Equality Riders represent diverse socio-economic, educational and faith backgrounds (including atheism) and a wide spectrum of identities in terms of race, ethnicity, nationality, sex, gender, sexuality, and physical ability. Soulforce Q leadership in collaboration with the Equality Riders selects schools for the final route. The second round of communication with the school administration opens. Over the course of six to eight weeks the SQER travels by bus following a schedule, predetermined and made public prior to beginning of the Ride. Soulforce claims obligation to bring the conversation about spiritual and social equality onto each campus thus engaging both physical and symbolic space and text whether in peaceful dialogue or in acts of non-violent civil disobedience, depending on an institution's stance.

SQER engagement with text occurs within political space of communal, organizational, and public policies, within theological space of Scripture studies and evolution of denominational creed, within academic space of discourse on curriculum, theories of gender/sexuality, family and social change, and within private space of individuals' narratives.

School policies reveal a complex view of homosexuality. It is often placed alongside conceptually and logistically diverse transgressions including rape, bestiality, theft, pornography, witchcraft, feminism, etc. The crux of the struggle rests in the opposing assertions of homosexuality as a holistic personal identity versus a set of behavioural lifestyle choices. In fact, majority of schools visited by SQER claim it is not homosexual identity itself but homosexual behaviour that constitutes punishable violation. What exactly constitutes homosexual behaviour outside of explicit sexual activity is less evident from school policies and leaves room for biased interpretation. In practice, SQER has documented cases of students encountering consequences for revealing their identity on social networking sites such as MySpace and Facebook, possession of non-pornographic films and literature with LGBT content, attending a local Pride event, being witnessed holding hands with someone of the same sex. The student-suspects are investigated, intimidated and often made attend psychological counselling as condition to avoid expulsion and/or outing to family members and their peer group.

Part of the ability to voluntarily claim one's own marginal sexual identity is availability of opportunity to question the practice of its involuntary assignment by the authorities. In some cases, the policy violators were sysgendered heterosexual students. Some schools go so far as to

prohibit advocacy of LGBT equality giving way to more institutional discretion in asserting gender conformity and heteronormativity. Examination of these policies raises a concern that any LGBT person facing harassment and/or violence at school is unlikely to seek protection from campus security and administration if the response is likely to shift focus from their immediate predicament to their true identity. Such open-ended policies and history of abusive practices in their enforcement create atmosphere of fear, isolation and desperation. In this regard, arguably the harshest campus climate for LGBT students is at Latter Day Saints institution Brigham Young University (BYU) in Provo, Utah, which is notorious for its high suicide rates. SQER highlights the direct relationship between text, space and self in this context.

As, inevitably, attention is drawn to sacred texts, SQER inspires dialogue on the authority and history of Scripture and value of exegesis. The Christian discourse about the LGBT identity and its expressions centres on several Biblical references collectively often referred to as the Clobber Passages. They span from the Genesis creation narratives, the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the Leviticus holiness code in the Old Testament to the Pauline texts in the New Testament. The process of re/claiming marginal sexual identity within Scripture is centuries old and ongoing. While definitely contributing to it, SQER does not intend to nor breaks any new theological ground regarding Biblical texts but utilizes existing theological, historical, and linguistic scholarship on the matter.

To date, SQER has visited fifty-eight campuses and has begun to see changes in the text. Samford University, a Baptist institution in Birmingham, Alabama, removed several references to homosexuality from its post-SQER policy. It now provides parity for heterosexual and non-heterosexual students with general requirement of abstinence. In 2007, after two consecutive SQER visits, BYU also amended its honour code. While behaviours are still forbidden, one's stated or perceived sexual orientation is no longer grounds for investigation. On April 30, 2007, the online edition of *Newsweek* magazine attributed this shift to SQER and the subsequent work of students and community members¹. Another dimension of text-based work comes into focus here. Personal testimonies of participants, members of the school community who are not open about their sexual identity and experiences of the alumni and former faculty and staff are solicited, recorded, shared with the media, vocalized on campus and/or delivered to authorities in the form of petitions, lists of grievances or sometimes in a box full of letters. In majority of situations SQER is the first and the only voice of affirmation for current LGBT people on campus and validation of past LGBT histories.

This invites the analysis of the discourse and interactions involving logistical and symbolic uses of space in the context of SQER. Equality Riders are unwavering in their commitment to bring the dialogue onto physical

campus largely due to the public meaning of such an event occurring openly in a space where it is normally forbidden. They insist on bringing LGBT identity from the margins to centre stage, even if temporarily, as a symbol of future attainable equality. Media coverage of SQER visits expands the discourse incalculably. Understanding this, schools that welcome this conversation on their campus seek to dictate the format. The plans range from Equality Riders having full day access to student centre, library, select classrooms, and informal public spaces including cafeterias for meals to invitation-only one-room-only one-hour-only single event offers. In most cases, the school requires any presentation by the Equality Riders to be followed by a statement from the administration stating its non-endorsement of the SQER views. More often than not, the schools assign student and/or faculty hosts to each Equality Rider which both allows for in-depth one-on-one conversations between them and easy security tracking. The desire to control the message and access to it in terms of both content (text) and means of dissemination (space) is the basis of these negotiations.

Schools that choose to officially not welcome SQER onto campus exercise their right to do so as private institutions and property owners. When all negotiation breaks down, engaging campus as both physical and symbolic space reveals complex boundaries between private and public spheres when it comes to faith-sexuality/gender-justice continuums. Most often, Equality Riders and their supporters are arrested as they non-violently trespass onto school property in an effort to either engage someone particular in dialogue and/or deliver a symbolic object to either administration or specific public location on campus such as a chapel, a memorial, a popular gathering spot. In the past these handmade objects included prayer shawls, memory tapestries, childhood photos, art pieces, flower wreaths and books. In one instance, Equality Riders staged a die-in at BYU during which more than twenty students and community members laid down one by one on the lawn by the campus entrance symbolizing those LGBT members of the Latter Day Saints community who have taken their lives because they were unable to reconcile with peers, family and church. When the die-in participants were arrested, they left white lilies and obituaries in front of hundreds of spectators and media. It was the most widely covered and discussed SQER action in 2006.

Often there occurs a literal convergence of text and space when Equality Riders, students and supporters chalk welcoming and affirming messages on campus property. Sometimes this action results in arrest for vandalism, but to date these charges have never been upheld in court. SQER participants who engage in civil disobedience usually plead guilty to trespassing, pay fines and/or do community service. Civil disobedience, due to its controversial nature, attracts additional attention to the issues, raises awareness of SQER visits and advances the dialogue beyond campus. Most evidently the text-space-self trajectory is present in the SQER encouragement

of schools, students and faculty to establish the so-called Safe Space programs and/or formal gay-straight alliances (GSA) as well as LGBT Alumni Associations. In majority of visits, the continuation of the SQER work is carried out locally by one of those initiatives.

Sometimes the text-space-self paradigm manifests itself on a macro level in unexpected ways. In April 2007, the city government of New York and Seattle issued decrees in support of SQER and pronouncing the dates of its visit as official Equality Ride Days in each respective location. Such proclamations send a signal to LGBT people in New York and Seattle as well as elsewhere about the type of socio-cultural climate they can expect to find there. Not surprisingly, these two cities consistently rank among the most LGBT-friendly places in the world.

Discourse and interaction within and surrounding SQER occur simultaneously on several levels for all persons involved: intrapersonal, interpersonal, communal within the activist group and between it and welcoming/opposing communities, multi/institutional (within and between campus, accrediting bodies such as Council of Christian Colleges and Universities and State Boards of Education, the related denomination), and the media. SQER is part of the American national discourse on marginal sexual identity within mainstream secular culture as well.

In summary, SQER follows the text-space-self progression in claiming marginal sexual identity within mainstream religious culture. It answers a call for defence and liberation articulated by LGBT people affected by specific school policies. Discussion of policy leads to engagement with sacred texts on which it is based. That leads to evaluation of implications of both policy and religious doctrine for the well-being of individuals and communities involved. It manifests itself in vocalized and embodied affirmation of LGBT identity through sanctioned dialogue or non-violent civil disobedience. That, in turn, points to the need for continued refinement of the text-space-self relationship within the faith-gender/sexuality-justice continuum even in the most conservative and seemingly unresponsive communities. As insular as many religious communities may appear and/or aspire to be, they as entities and their members as individuals still function within a complex web of influences in need of reconciliation.

As a uniquely American project, SQER draws on the US history of open socio-political discourse as well as 20th century precedents of other successful identity movements, mainly the suffrage movement and the African-American civil rights movement, which were rooted in and played out across the spectrum of Christianity in the USA. In fact, SQER's very format is inspired by the Freedom Rides of the 1960s, which advanced desegregation in the American South. It remains to be seen if this model of claiming marginal sexual identity within mainstream religious (and secular) culture can be adapted successfully elsewhere in the world.

Notes

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Sacred Sexuality and Conservative American Christianity: Probing the Boundaries

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Abstract

This paper explores the conflicted sexual and spiritual beliefs of five present or former evangelical Christians living in the southwestern US. The churches associated with these individuals traditionally teach that the only legitimate expression of sexuality is within the confines of monogamous heterosexual marriage. Embracing their individual sexuality and recapturing their individual sexual autonomy, which includes the freedom to choose non-monogamy or same-sex couplings, these persons moved across the boundaries of sexual and social normalcy proscribed by their religion. For most of these individuals, their pilgrimage towards sexual liberty (the capacity to experience and express healthy sexuality without coercive constraints) is self-perceived as personally and spiritually rewarding even as they experience isolation and condemnation from their original church affiliations. They found that sacred sexuality is a matter of perspective; sexual purity is not abstinence or withholding pleasure, but in becoming a generous and sincere partner. For one professional clergy, departure from mainstream Christianity came after a long period of growing frustration at the heavy-handed tactics used by church leadership to suppress heteroglossia concerning sexuality within the Scriptures. As this clergyman expressed divergent views from the accepted theological paradigm concerning sexuality, he was labelled a heretic by his church and many of its members. A series of informal ethnographic interviews with this couple and three individuals reveals the various social and religious dimensions of their experiences: expressing erotic desire as worship, fearing public censure, experiencing loss.

Key Words: Sacred, sexuality, Christian, fundamentalism, polyamory, heteroglossia, heretic, clergy, hegemony.

1. Introduction

Fundamentalist Christian churches argue that strict, heterosexual monogamy is the only divinely-endorsed form of marriage or sexual relationship. In spite of contradictory biblical passages, which reveal polygyny as commonplace among biblical patriarchs and even a divine reward, strict monogamy remains a hegemonic doctrine. These churches are

vigilant to suppress dialogue concerning human sexual variety. Yet, in spite of the risks, some individuals live happily on (or outside) the border of permissible behaviour and speech.

I conducted more than fifty semi-structured, informal interviews¹ with over twenty individuals and four couples between 2003 and 2008. I interviewed individuals in Botswana, South Africa, and the southwestern United States. This paper presents four case studies from this cohort. All four of these conversations were conducted in the USA. My interest in this research arose out of HIV/AIDS work I have done in southern Africa. I was particularly interested in exploring why individuals take extraordinary risks in their pursuit of emotional intimacy. Campbell found this motive is a significant factor in the spread of HIV/AIDS in southern Africa.² Seeking a cross-cultural comparison, I began to explore if hunger for intimacy led individuals in the US to engage in risky sexual behaviour. The connection between sexuality and the sacred arose from this original question.

As illustrated in the ethnographic sketches below, these individuals use a language and lifestyle that challenges the doctrine taken by their churches of origin. Yet their behaviour and language are not unfamiliar to any student of the Bible. As Jolene (below) mentioned, Christ was the descendent of two prostitutes, Rahab and Tamar³. Nearly all of the biblical patriarchs and several attributed authors of scripture were practicing polygamists. The Bible book, Song of Songs, is explicitly erotic. It is ironic that the fundamentalist churches who are the most vocal proponents of the absolute and unchanging authority of the Bible also suppress reasonable dialogue about its message concerning sexuality.

2. Case Study 1: Jeff: Awakening and Excommunication

Jeff, late 40's, was an assistant-youth pastor at a conservative Baptist congregation. He describes a transformation in his perception of sexuality and the sacred that occurred over several years. He devoted an intensive season for studying the sexuality in the Bible. Here is a brief excerpt from his conversation with me:

I had become increasingly aware that the teaching being given about sex and the bible from the pulpit was not biblical. Preachers, if they spoke about it at all, always chose the passages which were negative. No one ever preaches about sex from the Song of Songs.

Then high up in the mountains while I was having my quiet time [during a pastor's retreat], it dawned on me. When God created Adam and Eve, he created them perfect. When he finished his creation, he said it was all very good. In

God's view, humanity was perfect when they were naked and unashamed of it. (We don't believe, as some religions do, that the fall was due to sex, but rather disobedience.) And here's the kicker, God handmade Eve to be pleasing to Adam. So when man looks at woman, the reason he gets all hot and bothered is because God made him that way! The reason why a woman looks so sexy is because God made her that way! God made her curves; he made her breasts and hair. He made her skin soft and her feet pretty. And between her legs...well for any red-blooded American male, that's heaven on earth! And the fruit of that tremendous pleasure, a precious baby, a gift of God. When I realized that the beauty of a woman seen with the eyes of a man is an expression of God's goodness to man...and his love too, I bowed my head in worship. For the woman it's similar. She's made to be complementary to man. They fit together so nicely. When all of that hit me, I wept and worshipped and praised God for his goodness to me and to all mankind.

Jeff's new found excitement would be short lived however. He shared his new discovery in a Wednesday night church service after returning from the retreat. Word of his message spread rapidly through the congregation. This 'libertine' message met with disfavor in the senior pastor's eyes. The senior pastor demanded that Jeff publicly recant his teachings. When he refused, he was branded a heretic by the church leadership. A few months after he delivered this message, Jeff was forced to resign. His job-loss was then a catalyst for dissolution of his marriage.

3. Case Study 2: Jolene: Christian Commercial Sex Worker

I heard about Jolene through Jeff, a long time friend of mine who had been a church youth pastor before his marriage split up. After a year of loneliness, he met Jolene online. She was an escort, a highly paid call girl. Interesting as that may be, the thing that I found far more intriguing was that she was a faithful Sunday school member and openly acknowledged her relationship with God, even with her clients. Jeff told her about the work I had been doing concerning HIV/AIDS in southern Africa and in my interest in the connection between the sacred and the sexual. Jolene is about thirty years old.

D: 'Just as a reminder, I have agreed to keep your identity anonymous, if and when I publish the results of my

research. I'm not sure when that may be or if I will ever use this in publication other than as an illustration or anecdote.'

J: Listen, I'd like to tell everyone about what I do! But, it would have very negative consequences if word got out to the wrong people. I enjoy it. I'm proud of who I am and what I do. It is a desperately needed service...My mom knows what I do. I've talked to her about it many times. She may not agree with me about it completely, but she's very open sexually and doesn't see anything wrong with it.

D: 'The thing that I find so interesting about you is that you are an escort but you also are an active church attendee.'

J: 'Sweetie, if that's the most interesting thing you know about me, we need to get a room!' she laughs.

I laughed too, but it sounded more like flirtation or invitation than jest. Sometimes it is difficult to stay on topic.

D: 'Well, OK. Jeff has told me some other interesting things...'

From there we talked about her different body piercings, her two children, and her fondness for chocolate-covered caramels. Jolene is divorced, but attached. She was in an open marriage, but her ex cheated on her. She promptly divorced him. Jolene is an entertaining talker. She inserts innuendo frequently into her conversations. She also makes constant eye contact.

Jolene returns to the topic of church:

J: I take my children to Sunday school almost every Sunday. We go to the same church as my Mom; the one I grew up in. I go to [Sunday school] class and take part in the discussions. I play the devil's advocate much of the time...I'll bet I'm the only one who has actually read the Bible through in the class. I like screwing with people who think they know it all. Screwing with their heads...(we laugh)...

D: What denomination do you attend?

J: It's a Methodist church.

D: The Methodist churches that I'm familiar with are pretty conservative concerning sexuality...they oppose homosexuality...really anything outside of monogamous marriage.

J: And only in the dark and in the missionary position...

We both laugh.

D: Yeah...so why do you stay in a church that would strongly condemn your occupation?

J: It's none of their business! Jesus himself was the descendent of two different whores. It's the church I grew up in and I go for the social connection with people I've known for years...and you know what? While the 'official church' might condemn me, I don't think God does.

D: What connection does God and sex have for you?

J: Well, it says that we were made in his image...you know...male and female he created...if we are sexual creatures; he must be a sexual creator.

D: Do you perceive a sacred element to the sex act?

J: Oh...no, not really. I mean we're sweaty and stinky and we shit...well, not during sex, I'm not into that!... (laughs) just because God made us do certain things doesn't mean that the act of doing them is sacred.

D: But sexuality is often an intimate connection, very different from our other bodily functions.

J: True...don't get me wrong, I think sex is wonderful and I think God gave it to us as a blessing, but I don't think it is necessarily an act of worship.

D: Jeff was impressed with how you openly acknowledge your relationship with God with your clients...

J: Well, not all of them! But I do with some of them. Jeff had told me a little about his background and I was making a connection to him. I am not ashamed of being a Christian...I don't try to hide it...see my cross?

She's referring to a gold, jewelled cross, which is attached to the zipper of her jumpsuit. Her jumpsuit plunges deeply in the back and front. The zipper starts about halfway between her shoulders and waistline in the centre front.

J: I usually wear a necklace that has a cross on it...

D: Even when you're meeting a client?

J: Yes...I don't take it off...sweetie; let me tell yah, I think the main thing about being a Christian is living the Golden Rule. And when I'm in bed with a guy, I definitely do unto him as I would like for him to do unto me! (She laughs...I follow)

D: Care to elaborate?

J: Oh yeah! (Laughs) I love giving head and love for a guy to go down on me! I love to take a man who is limp and feel him swell in my mouth...I love the unique combination of hard and soft...and I love the taste, well usually...sometimes a guy can taste bad. Guess it depends on what he's eaten lately.

D: Do many of your clients go down on you?

J: Yeah, several. I've got several regulars who get off from giving pleasure as much as I do. Let me tell you baby, we get along really well! (Laughs)...I'm easily multi-orgasmic and can go for hours...or would like to (laughs)...just haven't found Mr. Endurance.

I am curious about Jolene's previous marriage.

D: Can I ask you about your marriage?

J: Sure.

D: Just how does one cheat in an open marriage?

J: Our agreement was simple. You can be with anyone you want; just don't keep any other relationship a secret. He was a pretty lucky guy right? Well, he lied to me about another girl he'd been seeing. He cheated. I saw an attorney the next day.

D: Wasn't that a little harsh?

J: Listen, we both agreed to have an open relationship. We both agreed we could see anyone we wanted. What possible reason would there be to lie? Besides it wasn't the only thing; just the final straw...

Jolene represents many, if not most, church members or attendees of conservative Christian churches in America. Not in her sexual openness nor in her belief that commercial sex work is a legitimate occupation, but in the lack of substantial awareness of a sacred-sexual connection. It is something that is done for fun or to express love. Like her, most would recognize that sex is a gift from their Creator to be enjoyed. Unlike Jolene, they would assert that it can only be legitimately experienced within heterosexual, monogamous marriage.

In spite of Jolene's unawareness of the sacred dimension to her sexual activity, she unconsciously links a spiritual ideal with a specific act, giving head with the same enthusiasm that she would like to receive. This act figures prominently across the interviews where sexuality is connected to the sacred.

Jolene has several body piercings. Besides her ears, her tongue, navel, and clitoris are pierced.

D: Which of your piercings hurt the most?

J: The one in my clit, definitely.

D: Does the piercing in your clit, is it your clit or through the hood...increase your pleasure?

J: Through my clit. Yes, definitely! Especially when I'm on top, or when I'm getting head. The pain was worth it!

D: I've heard that people get their tongues pierced to give better head. True for you?

J: Yeah. My boyfriend and I got them done at the same time. It was a gift for each other. We just have to be careful that he doesn't get his hooked on my clit...

D: Has that happened?

J: Yeah, about two weeks after we got our tongues done. Wasn't a big deal though, just a little scary.

4. **Case Study 3: Ambria: Violence and Redemption**

Ambria is unique among those I interviewed in several ways. She is young; she is only twenty-two years old. She is very articulate, somewhat brash in the sense of being aggressively assertive and confrontational, and utterly unashamed of her sexuality. Her conversation with me was initially heavily comprised of slang terms with which I was unfamiliar. She was somewhat annoyed and condescending when I asked for her to explain what she had previously said. She dropped the use of slang terms and spoke on my 'tedious' level.

She, like some of the others I interviewed, was a victim of sexual abuse by a trusted authority figure in her life. Her step-father began to force her to perform sexual acts with him when she was twelve years old, which for her was pre-menarche. When she told her mother about the first incidence, her mother slapped her in the face and accused her of being a liar, believing Ambria was simply trying to cause problems. Ambria is very independent spirited by her own admission. However, her mother refused to believe Ambria. Instead, her mother forced her to memorize bible verses about speaking the truth and gave her berating religious lectures. When Ambria was fourteen, she ran away from home to escape the frequent sexual abuse and the oppressive religious environment.

During my initial interview with Ambria, I asked about how her husband of only two years felt about her active sexual involvement with other men and women.

A: He's fine with it. We both have others on the side anyway. We've always had an open relationship. We married because it was convenient at the time. But, it's not convenient now. He doesn't have the courage to be open with me about his other relationships. I mean, he tells me about them, but he can't discuss what he's feeling about them and how they affect us. So, it leaves me constantly wondering what the future holds. I think his heart is with a previous lover he had back home. In fact, he's told me as much.

Ambria and Craig have been married for less than two years. Her discussion about her crumbling marriage relationship is surprisingly unemotional, even callous.

D: Doesn't that hurt?

A: On a scale of one to ten, about a three. What really hurts is to be raped by your step-father and then have your mother blame you for it or say it never happened. That's a ten.

D: I can't imagine.

A: What?!

D: I can't comprehend the hurt you must have felt.

A: No, *no one* can! It pisses me off when people say 'I understand', when they've never been through it! They have no idea! This one's right up there too. When I was seventeen, I got arrested for hooking. I called my mom to ask for help. She sent someone from her Sunday school class with some money and a letter. She couldn't even come her fucking self to see me. This lady tells me, 'We're praying for you. We understand how hard things are for you now, young lady. Remember, Jesus is the answer'. What a fucking bitch! When I opened the letter, my mom told me to never call her again. She completely disowned me. Then this lady offered to help me get a cab! Not a ride, but a cab! What a fucking hypocrite!

Her eyes reddened with pain as she recounted the deep rejection she had experienced from her mother on several occasions. Most of these humiliating or painful events were centred on Ambria's sexuality.

According to Schnarch,⁴ because sexuality is both a fundamental human drive and deeply connected with one's sense of self, conflicts around the sexual aspects of a relationship are an especially intense (and effective)

crucible for personal and relational growth. For Ambria, this event became a watershed moment. She obtained her GED, took a college entrance exam and performed so well on it that she was offered a few scholarships. She is working toward a degree in psychology.

I asked how the religious condemnation by her mother coupled with her mother's rejection had affected her view of God or religion.

A: How has it changed my view of God? It hasn't really...and my take on religion hasn't changed much either. Religion is how people make themselves important to God. For many...like my mom...that means tearing others down so you can feel better about yourself. I think my mom is a very sexual person, but she tries to hide it; she's ashamed of it. Because she hides this part of herself, she cannot be honest with God...God expects us to be honest with him. I am honest with God and with myself. Sex has forced me to be honest.

D: God expects us to be honest with him...are you drawing that from the Bible?

A: Yeah. God wants truth from our hearts or something like that.

D: (God) desires truth in the inward parts...

A: Yeah.

D: So in a way sex has forced you to become righteous?

A: No, I'm not righteous...

D: But sex has caused you to become honest with yourself and with God, which pleases him...

5. Case Study 4: Vance and Barb-Divine Swingers

More than one of those interviewed view oral sex as an intimate act of communion. When Christ instructed his disciples to eat his body and drink his blood, understood symbolically in fundamental Christian churches, it was the most intimate form of connection to Christ and his bride, the church catholic. So it is with oral sex for many of these couples.

Vance and Barb are the primaries in a polyamorous relationship involving several others. Both are in their early fifties. They both have bisexual poly relationships. They are former missionaries to South America through an ultra-conservative Christian denomination. Currently, both of them work in secular jobs in a large city in the southwest US.

For both of them, oral sex is the favourite activity and most profound form of sacred sexuality. Vince views oral sex to be the most intimate form of sexual activity. With his male lovers especially, he expresses the intense depth of communion through this act. Following is a

brief excerpt from two conversations I had with them in 2008. It was our third and fourth interview and they were very comfortable talking with me.

V: I just love it when I'm in a relationship with another guy that I am growing to love and he is growing to love me! It is a wonderful time of fellowship and friendship where we can be completely open with each other. To me, it is one of the greatest blessings of life for both of us to be able to express our deepest feelings and longings, even...especially when they are sexual. I just love it when a guy tells me 'I'm really horny,' and I can just take his cock into my mouth and get him off. I love it when our relationship has progressed to the point where we both feel comfortable with each other and where there is a loving bond between us. When I can ask him to thrust his hard cock deep into my throat and when he cums I'll swallow him completely. That's the most intimate expression of acceptance. When I can say to him, 'I want to receive you completely, and take you into my whole being.' That's how we can bless each other and give to each other and minister to each other. When you swallow a guy's cum, it is expressing the highest form of acceptance and love. Man, just talking about it makes me horny!

Later, I asked Barb about her feelings related to Vance's interaction with others.

D: Barb, how do you feel about Vance being sexually involved with other men?

B: We have chosen to bless each other with our sexual capacities. When we are together, I yield my body to him as a vessel...a channel...of sexual favour from God within me adoring and worshipping the God within him. It is a divine combination of spiritual and sexual oneness. It is our privilege to give ourselves to others in the same way...to serve others in love, and pleasure. Because the Holy Spirit indwells other believers, we can each meet the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of the body of Christ, living in human form. So when Vince is with another man or woman, I rejoice that he is serving Christ in them...and it's mutual between us.

V: Absolutely!

6. Discussion

Unfortunately, space does not permit an extensive discussion of this ethnographic material. While a number of topics beg deconstruction, I will limit my discussion to three key themes that emerge in these vignettes.

First, each of these individuals experience sexuality on the boundaries of what is acceptable within Christianity and American culture. By practicing some form of non-monogamy, having bisexual relationships, and using explicit sexual language they defy ecclesiastical hegemony. All experienced repressive Christian backgrounds. Through different experiences, each made a transition from sexual repression to sexual freedom. Similar to the Israelites' biblical exodus and redemption from bondage in Egypt, these individuals journeyed on a sexual exodus leading to redemption from the bondage of religious repression. In one interview not recounted above, Vance and Barb even refer to their present experience as living in a 'land flowing with 'milk' and 'honey'', innuendo intended. Fundamentalist Christian leaders argue, 'a person's morality determines their theology'. Yet, for both Vance and Jeff, movement towards luminal sexual practice was the result of intensive exegetical studies of the Bible. Thus, their theology informed, even transformed, their sexual morality.

Second, the practice of ritual scarification figured prominently for Jolene and Ambria. Both had body piercings for the express purpose of increasing their own and their partner's sexual pleasure. Jolene had one tattoo near her ankle while Ambria had multiple tattoos throughout her body. These tattoos were for beautification or an expression of their personality. Ambria had at least two tattoos, which were memorials for loved ones. Whether practiced by the Maori in New Zealand, the Nuer in Sudan and Ethiopia, or Christians in the west, scarification is a painful process demarcating a transition in life. For Ambria and Jolene, having their tongue, clitoris, or lip pierced was a visible, external evidence of their commitment to sexual pleasure.

Third, Vance, Barb, and Jeff expressed a conscious and Jolene an unconscious awareness or desire to integrate sexuality and sexual service with spirituality and worship. Rather than reject religion altogether, they sought to reconcile their past with their present through sexual means. Vance and Barb explicitly perceive that the intra-body reception of their lover's sexual fluids and sexual body was akin to a sacred communion. Like all acts of worship, sexual ministry as an act of worship involves a sacrifice. By enduring ritual scarification, Jolene, her boyfriend, and Ambria had piercings in their bodies to enhance their capacity for giving sexual pleasure. The parallels with sacred ritual are significant. Jesus, the Christ, is known as the sacrificial Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. His hands, feet, and side were pierced as a sacrifice with the ultimate purpose of redemption. The end result of this redemption, pleasures forevermore.

All of these interviewed perceive their sexuality in positive terms, in spite their churches' perspectives. Even Ambria's sexual trauma led to a positive outcome, deliverance from an abusive home and religion. The extent of psychosexual damage caused by fundamentalist religion's rigid application of sexually repressive doctrine may never be known. For each of these positive outcomes, there are likely dozens if not scores of negative ones.

Notes

¹ In the interviews, I removed long pauses and repeated words. All of their names have been changed in this paper and locations given are very general in order to maintain anonymity.

² C Campbell, *Letting Them Die: Why HIV/AIDS Intervention Programmes Fail*, The International African Institute and Double Story Books, Cape Town, 2003.

³ See Joshua 2:1 and Matthew 1:5 for Rahab; for Tamar, see Genesis 38:24 and Matthew 1:3.

⁴ D Schnarch, *Passionate Couples: Love, Sex, and Intimacy in Emotionally Committed Relationships*, W.W. Norton, New York, 1997.

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PART III

Paradigms

Free Love for Free Persons: An Anarchist Utopia Based on Sexual Self-Ownership

Jürgen Schaupp

Abstract

Around 1900, various radical groups in the United States try to change the political direction the country is headed. Be it communists, anarchists, or other political reformers, re-evaluating the role of society and individual has them also re-evaluate existing morals and sexual norms. The refusal to accept social norms as universals leads them to a common set of questions about sexual bonds, friendship, and individual sexual expression. But although these various groups agree in their critic of existing sexual norms, their attempts to redefine these norms differ and follow their political beliefs. The women's movement and the sexual reform movement in general, can therefore not be separated from political movements.

Key Words: Utopia, free love, anarchy, anarchist, class, gender, individualism, women's rights, Goldmann, Ruedebusch

In the latter half of the 19th century and the early 1900s, we find a number of radical movements in the United States that want to reform and re-evaluate the position society holds towards sex and sexuality. Be it Socialists, Anarchists, or radical sexual reformers, they set out to redefine society, the relationships between individuals and between the individual and society. Although, they have different views on the reform of society, questioning the status-quo leads them to question the standards of sexual relationships.

Traditionally, anarchism tries to free the individual from class inequality by abolishing government structures and its restrictions. Since anarchism has the goal of establishing free interaction between equal individuals, this should also apply to sexual interactions between individuals. For the early 1900s, the most prominent feminist anarchist is certainly Emma Goldman. From her anarchist vantage point she forms positions on power and gender, women's rights, public versus private, class and gender, marriage and sexuality, friendship and marriage.

Around 1900, the German-American writer Emil Ruedebusch extended the political ideas of Anarchism to sexual bonds between individuals. Living near Chicago, he found himself in a position where he was able to combine the ideas of American anarchists with the German individualistic tradition following Nietzsche, Stirner, and Mühsam. For Ruedebusch, self-ownership also means sexual self-ownership. The

foundation of the bourgeois society is family and marriage, and marriage is at its roots a contract that asserts property rights over another person. This sexual norm prevents individuals from forming friendships with individuals of the other gender and in turn prevents them from developing into fulfilled and self-reliant people. The root cause of a bad society lies in its mistaken views on marriage. Consequently, reform of society ought to start with a revolution of gender not of class relations. This of course puts R debusch in opposition to the political goals of anarchism and socialism.

For socialists, the primary problem is class, not gender. Even women in the socialist movement who focus on the improvement of the status of women accept the gender problem as part of the larger class struggle. Clara Zetkin, founder of the international women's day¹, sees this as the main distinction between the Socialist women's movement and the bourgeois women's movement.² While individual socialists might differ in the importance of gender within class struggle, gender equality, women's education, reform of marriage, and the relation between the sexes in general are seen in the framework of class. In this they agree with the anarchists. Social ills, and subsequently sexual ills -be it prostitution, exploitation, sexual hypocrisy, or women stuck in bad marriages- are caused by capitalist society.

All three of these approaches share a common distaste for the existing society and its approach towards sexuality. For a new society with new morals, they set out to redefine the Personal and the Political, individuality and community, the Self and the Other, love, sex, friendship, and companionship. They differ little in their critique of the existing system. Their goals of sexual reform, women's rights, combined with a need to rethink the relations between individuals are similar, the difference is in the ways they try to achieve these goals.

1. Socialist Revolution: The Question of Class and Gender

At least initially, socialist rejection of the capitalist system extended into sexual morals. Bourgeois morals and institutions are as perverted as the bourgeois system. Alexandra Kollontai sees marriage as one of these institutions:

Bourgeois morality with its introverted individualistic family based entirely on private property, has carefully cultivated the idea that one partner should completely 'possess' the other. (...) Even the knights recognised the right of their wives to have chichesbi (platonic friends and admirers) and to receive the devotion of other knights and minnesingers. It is the bourgeoisie who have carefully tendered and fostered the ideal of absolute possession of

the 'contracted partner's' emotional as well as physical 'I', thus extending the concept of property rights to the right to include the other person's whole spiritual and emotional world.³

Marriage is based on property law. The fact of women not having equal rights is a part of the perverted capitalist society. For socialist feminists overcoming the capitalist society is the ultimate goal without which women's rights and gender equality cannot be achieved. Questions on sexuality are part of the class struggle. This separates them from the moderate bourgeois camp. Not universal sisterhood and cooperation, but agitation and education is the goal of socialist feminists. Again, Zetkin:

Our task is not to convince individual bourgeois women of the harmlessness of socialism. Our task is to make the masses of proletarian women aware of the situation and suffering of their class, to convince them of the necessity of the removal of capitalist society.⁴

Socialist theory put class ahead of gender issues, and trying to solve gender questions within existing society would contradict this theory. But in practice, there was cooperation between socialist and bourgeois feminists. Be it the problem of prostitution, the need for new sexual morals in general, or the question of contraception -their opinions of the situation at hand coincided.⁵ For socialist women in America this put them at odds with the International socialist movement. Examining the role of socialist women in the American movement, Buhle tries to solve this problem by distinguishing between immigrant and native-born feminists: 'The class-conscious response of immigrant Socialists thus stands in sharp contrast to a militant and independent sisterhood advocated by native-born women activists'⁶

But socialism got its theoretical foundations -and ideological updates- from Europe. As long as American Socialists wanted to consider themselves as part of the International, class came before gender. This put them as much in a situation of powerlessness as the bourgeois movement they criticized. The bourgeois women's movement did not question the system and instead tried to achieve its goal within the system, thus needing acceptance by those in power. Likewise, the socialist women's movement needed acceptance within the wider socialist movement, a movement whose main theorists were men.

With socialists gaining power in Europe, radical feminism and a re-evaluation of the gender question, was no longer the party-line. In post-revolutionary Russia, Kollontai was pushed to the fringes, her positions on sex were now unacceptable to mainstream communism⁷. In Germany the

Socialists became Social-democrats and Zetkin split with the main party.⁸ Thus, the socialist women's movement in the US lost its international backing. The last blow came with the Red Scare after World War I.

2. **Anarchist Revolution: The Individual and the Others**

Emma Goldman agrees with the socialists on the conditions of women in capitalist society and largely with their analysis. But for Goldman, the sexual repression women experience in the US is more than just the outcome of capitalist society. Comparing the US and Europe she sees the US burdened by its heritage, the 'hypocrisy of puritanism':

Puritanism, in this the twentieth century is as much the enemy of freedom and beauty as it was when it landed on Plymouth Rock. It repudiates, as something vile and sinful, our deepest feelings; but being absolutely ignorant as to the real functions of human emotions, Puritanism is itself the creator of the most unspeakable vices.⁹

As many of her contemporaries, Goldman claims to approach the question of sexual relations, marriage and love from an enlightened vantage point, one that is founded on logic and science, not dogma and superstition. Puritanism with its disregard for sexuality as a basic human need and its disrespect for the human body is seen as having led women into a state of sickness.

Puritanism, with its perversion of the significance and functions of the human body, especially in regard to women, has condemned her to celibacy, or not the indiscriminate breeding of a diseased race, or to prostitution... Absolute sexual continence is imposed upon the unmarried woman, under pain of being considered immoral or fallen, with the result of producing [...] a great variety of nervous complaints.¹⁰

Goldman mirrors the theories of the emerging psycho-analysis, when she continues, 'The arbitrary and pernicious dictum of total continence probably also explains the mental inequality of the sexes.'¹¹ Sexual repression leads to psychological instability in women and also mental inequality. The hypocritical society is the cause of prostitution¹², which according to Goldman is not that much different from marriage:

Nowhere is woman treated according to the merit of her work, but rather as a sex. It is therefore almost inevitable

that she should pay for her right to exist [...] with sex favours. Thus it is merely a question of degree whether she sells herself to one man, in or out of marriage, or too many men.¹³

Like the socialist women, Goldman sees bourgeois marriage as an institution that asserts rights over another person. And by putting the emphasis on marriage as a sex-contract, Goldman points out just how far this marriage is from the ideal of romantic love: 'Marriage and love have nothing in common; they are as far apart as the poles; are, in fact, antagonistic to each other.'¹⁴ Critique of marriage as a form of women's enslavement is not unique to anarchists, Elis Havelock writes:

The prostitute is really paid extremely well considering how little she gives in return; the wife is really paid extremely badly considering how much she often gives, and how much she necessarily gives up. For the sake of the advantage of economic dependence on her husband, she must give up, as Ellen Key observes, those rights over her children, her property, her work, and her own person which she enjoys as an unmarried woman, even, it may be added, as a prostitute. The prostitute never signs away the right over her own person, as the wife is compelled to do; ...¹⁵

As an anarchist, Goldman opposes a society that is based on ownership and property rights. As a feminist, she sees the situation of women as a striking example of what such a society can do to individuals. But although her views are informed by her anarchist views of society, Goldman tries to reach out to a wider feminist audience. While not all of her readers might agree with her solution -the abolishment of capitalist society- Goldman hopes to convince them at least of the fact that the problems are caused by society and not by immoral individuals as the Temperance movement would have it. In talking about society causing prostitution, Goldman reaches out to bourgeois readers, by referring to 'Havelock Ellis, [who] while not so absolute in dealing with the economic cause, is nevertheless compelled to admit that it is indirectly and directly the main cause.'¹⁶ Goldman gives lectures about birth control¹⁷ and in her autobiography; Goldman expresses her solidarity with Margaret Sanger and others who got arrested for giving out contraceptives or just for providing information on birth control.¹⁸

While trying to reach a wider audience, Goldman warns about the limits of woman suffrage. Although Goldman thinks that women, once they are allowed to develop their full potential, will be as capable as men,

Goldman does not embrace the argument that they would be any better than men.

I see neither physical, psychological, nor mental reasons, why woman should not have the equal right to vote with man. But that cannot possibly blind me to the absurd notion that woman will accomplish that wherein man has failed.¹⁹

Women's right to vote will not overcome the essential problems of state power and individual rights, of collective and the self. The state will still be a state and the individual an individual. In this, Goldman also differs from the socialists. For socialists, the problem is in capitalism not in the state as such. For a communist like Kollontai, a socialist state with equal rights for women and the right to a divorce offers everything women need. Once the communist revolution removes the patriarchal system with the husband as supporter 'woman must become accustomed to seek and to find this support elsewhere, no longer in the person of the man, but in the person of society, of the State.'²⁰

Goldman's anarchism leads her to focus on the individual instead, and here there couldn't be a stronger contrast: 'the problem that confronts us today, and which the nearest future is to solve, is how to be one's self and yet in oneness with others'²¹

3. **Radical Sexual Revolution: Self-Owners in a State-Less Utopia**

The problem of self and others is also what Emil Rüdébusch sees at the core of sexual problems and at the core of society as a whole. Rüdébusch, a second generation German-American fluent in German and English, combines German individualist ideas with the American Free Love movement of the 19th century. He seeks to connect German reformers and American anarchists.

His critique of existing society is similar to Goldman's critique of society as the cause of sexual frustration, hypocrisy, inequality, and exploitation. In his novel 'Die Eigenen'²² he sets out to show how a group of friends rid themselves of society's restrictions and form their own communitarian settlement.

For Rüdébusch, the goal for each individual is to reach a state of full Self Realization -following Stirner- to fully become his/her Own (Eigene). Society prevents this self realization with its moral codes and restrictions. At the core of these sexual morals are a set of restrictions that regulate sexual contact, and which by so doing also regulate the intellectual contact between the sexes. Women, once married, find themselves in a situation, where they no longer can choose whom to meet or befriend without violating the moral

standards. A woman following the standards becomes isolated and isn't in a position where she can intellectually grow through conversations with others.

Rüdebusch, similar to Goldman and Havelock, who dismiss bourgeois marriage as a sexual contract, sees the connection between love and sexual desire in the marriage contract as one of the main problems. Like Goldman, he rejects the ideal of romantic love, a life-long connection between love as friendship and sexual desire.²³ For Rüdebusch sexual monogamy is only possible as a result of restrictions, either self-imposed or by society, a truly free individual fulfilling his or her desires, would not be monogamous.²⁴ It is therefore wrong to base marriage on sex. Instead, he proposes to base relationships on friendship and love. Love he defines as an 'intense recognition of the value another human being has for our well-being, for our happiness.'²⁵

Goldman hopes that 'Emancipation should make it possible for woman to be human in the truest sense.'²⁶ Rüdebusch extends this to men. Only in a society, where men have intellectual and sexual contacts with women who are free and the Owner of their Own, will men be able to become their true self. In the utopian community Rüdebusch proposes, conventional marriage is disbanded and replaced with a partnership based on intellectual and emotional love. Contrary to US-law in the 1900s, Rüdebusch suggests that reproductive decisions should be made by the woman alone.²⁷ If a woman decides to have children, she can do so on her own, or choose a father for the child, who would not have to be the biological father.²⁸

To be free from any society control, each adult person in his imagined utopian community would have a room of his or her own.²⁹ It is completely up to the individual to decide, with whom they want to meet in this room.³⁰ A proposal that the German reformer Helene Stöcker sees as one extreme at the spectrum of sexual reform.

It is out of the question that the institutions that have arisen from the absolute sexual dominance of men in former times should continue to exist unchanged amid the changed political, cultural, and economic conditions of today. This being an age of transition, there are peculiar difficulties and conflicts, and proposals have been made to deal with these by new forms of marriage. Thus we have proposals for trial marriage; for companionate marriage; for three-party marriage; even four-party marriage. [...]. The German-American Ruedebusch proposes erotic relations with unlimited numbers.³¹

While Rüdebusch doesn't deny this possibility, the goal is not promiscuity, but to leave it to each individual to decide how few or many of

their contacts would be sexual. Erna, a young woman in Rüdëbusch's novel, frequently receives visitors in her room, and after it is made clear to a visiting musician that this doesn't constitute a sexual invitation on her part, she concludes that 'being alone with a man you don't love can under certain circumstances be pleasant and valuable.' Not to leave anything up to imagination, the narrator continues: 'The musician visited frequently and it became a pleasant relationship for both of them, without it becoming any more intimate.'³²

Rüdëbusch laid out a model of how to reach a new society not by revolution but by forming independent communitarian colonies that follow his outlines of self realization and sexual freedom. While he didn't see his community become reality, he tried to spread his ideas as widely as possible. He wrote both in German and in English for an audience in Germany and in the US.

Rüdëbusch theory is at its core a continuation of the enlightenment. Self realization leads to self fulfilment. His utopia is anarchist in the sense that he doesn't want to replace society with a better one, -neither bourgeois nor socialist- but with a community of self reliant self Owners. He is not anarchist in a political sense. Putting the question of the Self and self realization at the centre, the class question becomes secondary.

4. Aftermath

The communists at the time decided to put class ahead of gender. With communist ideology, they had a theory to fully explain human interactions. Looking back, this decision of course seems to be motivated by the same patriarchal structure they set out to overcome.

Rüdëbusch's radical sex reforms put him at the fringe of the sexual reform movement. Like the anarchists he wants a society based on relations between individual persons. His individualism founded on Stirner's egoism is more individualistic than Goldman's syndicalism. At the same time he lacks a clear stand on the class question. While he recognizes the problem, he sees it as secondary to the question of sex. This makes him both too radical and not radical enough for the left movement.

Goldman never settled down, her love ideal was in constant conflict with the environment around her.³³ She lectured on birth control, tried to convince the public to legalize contraception, and engaged against militarism. At the same time, she got portrayed as America's most dangerous terrorist, and her lectures for women's right were reported as leftist agitation. On December 21, 1919 a up and coming J. Edgar Hoover succeeded in having Goldman deported to Russia.³⁴

Communists, anarchists, and individualists like Rüdëbusch agree in their critic of existing norms, but of course provide different solutions to reform society. These solutions, the suggestions on sexual reforms, follow

quite consequently from their political views -or individualistic traditions in Rüdibusch's case. An approach that looks at the sex radicals as a radical sexual reform-group opposite the bourgeois women's movement without looking at their political orientation misses this.

A third category that reappears again and again is ethnic background. Views on society and its norms get sorted by cultural background. And right, in Rüdibusch's case his sexual utopia is clearly based on German individualistic tradition. But if one reduces his views to an *Immigrant vs. American* dichotomy, one would miss the fact that German-American is not German. Rüdibusch writes against puritanism. And while he might play with cultural stereotypes himself, his disregard for the existing norms don't differ from native-born American reformers.

Notes

¹see: <http://www.internationalwomensday.com/>

²see Clara Zetkin, 'Reinliche Scheidung', *Die Gleichheit. Zeitschrift für die Interessen der Arbeiterinnen*, 4, 1894. Nr 8, p. 63: reprinted in *Die Frauenfrage in Deutschland 1865-1915*, Elke Frederiksen (ed.), Reclam, Stuttgart, 1981, p.107.

³Aleksandra Kollontai, 'Sexual Relations and the Class Struggle', *Sexual Relations and the Class Struggle, Love and the new Morality*, Alix Holt (ed.), Falling Wall Press, Bristol, 1972 p. 6.

⁴Clara Zetkin, op. cit., p. 111. My translation.

⁵see 'Sexual Emancipation' pp.246-287 in Mari Jo Buhle, *Women and American Socialism 1870 -1920*, University of Illinois Press, Urbana, Illinois, 1981.

⁶Mari Jo Buhle , op. cit., p. xiii.

⁷see Gregory Carlton, *Sexual Revolution in Bolshevik Russia*, University of Pittsburgh Press, Pittsburgh, 2005, p. 46.

⁸see Florence Hervé, Wiebke Buchholz-Will, *Geschichte der deutschen Frauenbewegung*, Pappy Rossa, Köln, 2001, p. 82.

⁹Emma Goldman, 'The Hypocrisy of Puritanism', *Anarchism and other Essays*, Mother Earth Publishing, New York, 1917, p. 170. Unaltered reprint, by Dover, New York, 1969

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 171-172.

¹¹Ibid., p. 172.

¹²Ibid., p. 173.

¹³Emma Goldman, 'The traffic in Women', *Anarchism and other Essays*, p. 179 .

¹⁴Emma Goldman, 'Marriage and love', *Anarchism and other Essays*, p.219.

¹⁵Ellis, Havelock. 1910. *Studies in the psychology of sex. Vol. VI Sex in relation to society*. Philadelphia: F.A. Davis. p.363-364.

¹⁶Emma Goldman, 'The traffic in Women', *Anarchism and other Essays*, p. 181.

¹⁷see 'Birth Control and Blood and Iron Militarism' pp. 131f, Candace Falk, *Love, Anarchy, and Emma Goldman*, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, 1990.

¹⁸Emma Goldman. *Living my Life*, Vol. 2, Alfred Knopf, New York, 1931 p. 587. Republished: Dover, New York, 1970 with original pagination.

¹⁹Emma Goldman, 'Woman suffrage', *Anarchism and other Essays*, p. 198.

²⁰Aleksandra Kollontai, *Communism and the Family*, Pluto Press Ltd., London, 1971, p. 6.

²¹Emma Goldman, 'The Tragedy of Woman's emancipation', *Anarchism and other Essays*, pp.213-214.

²²Emil Rüdebusch, *Die Eigenen. Ein Tendenzroman für freie Geister*, Johannes Råde, Berlin, n.d. (1903/04).

²³Emil Rüdebusch, 'Das Liebesideal', in *Die Eigenen*, pp.195-212.

²⁴Ibid. p. 203.

²⁵Ibid. p. 205.

²⁶Emma Goldman, 'The Tragedy of Woman's emancipation', *Anarchism and other Essays*, pp. 214.

²⁷Emil Rüdebusch, 'Die Kinder und die Ehen der Eigenen', in *Die Eigenen*, p.300.

²⁸Ibid. p. 301.

²⁹Emil Rüdebusch, 'Die Hochzeitsnacht des Egoisten' in *Die Eigenen*, pp. 107-117.

³⁰Emil Rüdebusch, 'Besucher im Privatheim' in *Die Eigenen*, p. 135.

³¹Helene Stöcker, 'Marriage as a Psychological Problem, in *Sexual Reform Congress London*, September 8-14, 1929, Norman Haire (ed.), Kegan Paul, London, 1930. pp. 604-605, reprinted in: Kaes, Anton, Martin Jay, and Edward Dimendberg. *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook. Weimar and now*, 3. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994. Published by University of California Press, 1994 p. 705.

³²Emil Rüdebusch, 'Besucher im Privatheim' in *Die Eigenen*, pp. 135-136. My translation.

³³see 'Promiscuity and Free Love' pp. 67f, Candace Falk, *Love, Anarchy, and Emma Goldman*, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, 1990.

³⁴Sally Thomas (ed.), *The Emma Goldman Papers, online exhibition*, University of California, 2002, <http://sunsite.berkeley.edu/Goldman/Exhibition/depotation.html>

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A Foucauldian Interpretation of Kinsey's Legacy

Robert Darrow

Abstract

The life and work of American sex researcher Alfred Kinsey are full of contradictions. Perhaps the most perplexing of these contradictions is that the results of his best-known studies are lionized within the scientific community and have been largely confirmed by subsequent research, though the methods Kinsey used to obtain those results have been widely criticized and abandoned by modern sex researchers.

I discuss the strongest criticisms of Kinsey's research methodology and examine the immediate reaction to his interview techniques and statistical analysis, as well his influence on contemporary research in the field. I conclude that Kinsey's research methods have been dismissed as naive, sloppy, and even prejudiced. Yet his data still holds water in the scientific community.

It's difficult to understand how a researcher who carried out a bad scientific study — by today's standards — could produce data that is still frequently cited today. The work of Michel Foucault offers one potential explanation. Foucault sees science as a disciplining political force, striving to dominate nature, and in the process, human organisms and their behaviour. Writing the first volume of *The History of Sexuality* thirty years after the publication of *Sexual Behaviour in the Human Male*, it's hard to imagine Foucault didn't have the Indiana University professor in mind when he introduced the idea of a *Scientia Sexualis*. Foucault writes of sexuality becoming 'entomologised,' and one can't help but conjure the image of Kinsey, who started his career collecting gall wasps.

This analysis suggests a final contradiction in Kinsey's legacy: Viewed through a Foucauldian lens, the man hailed as a sexual liberator in the United States may actually have been one of history's great discipliners of human sexuality, reducing sexual variation to scales and charts, and furthering the unspoken goal of controlling nature/bodies in the name of science.

Key Words: Alfred Kinsey, Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, *Sexual Behaviour in the Human Male*, Sex research

1. Introduction

A recurrent theme in anecdotes about Alfred C. Kinsey is that he was a man awash in contradictions, and the paradoxes of his life extended to his most famous research. The Kinsey reports were some of the best-selling

but least read books published in mid-twentieth century America. Kinsey hated sloppiness, but was criticized for the pervasiveness of it in his statistics. If there's one word that comes to mind when describing the two thick volumes that guaranteed Kinsey a prominent place in the history of both science and popular culture, it's not 'revolutionary,' 'foundational,' or 'definitive,' but 'controversial.'

Nearly sixty years after the publication of *Sexual Behaviour in the Human Male*, those contradictions have been cemented in the legacy of the scientist and his work. Kinsey's research methods have been roundly criticized by other scientists and statisticians. Even his former associates have questioned some of his techniques. Perhaps most tellingly, Kinsey's practices of conducting interviews and collecting case histories have not been adopted by contemporary sex researchers. Yet despite the prevailing air of scientific doubt surrounding his research methods, Kinsey's conclusions have stuck and the man is still lionized by the current generation of sex researchers. Vern Bullough, a distinguished scholar of the history of sexuality until his death in 2006, wrote, 'Kinsey was the major factor in changing attitudes about sex in the twentieth century ... In spite of vicious attacks on him ... his data continue to be cited and used.'¹

How are we to understand this state of affairs? The traditional view of scientific research suggests that a study should be judged by the validity of the methods used to obtain the results. Kinsey's science is suspect, but the man and his work remain eminently respected among scientists. The philosophy of Michel Foucault may be able to shed some light on this most head-scratchingly counterintuitive of Kinsey's paradoxes. In the late 1970s and early 1980s Foucault began examining the history of sexuality,² with a particular interest in what he saw as a shift in the discourse about sex roughly concurrent with the rise of industrialization and bourgeois culture.

Foucault rejects the traditional hypothesis that Victorian society repressed sexuality, and suggests that however strongly Victorians restricted the expression of sexual behaviour, they simultaneously created a discourse that forced talk about sex out into the open, and subjected sexuality to a level of definition previously unmatched in human history:

Toward the beginning of the eighteenth century, there emerged a political, economic, and technical incitement to talk about sex. And not so much in the form of a general theory of sexuality as in the form of analysis, stocktaking, classification, and specification, of quantitative or causal studies. This need to take sex 'into account,' to pronounce a discourse on sex that would not derive from morality alone but from rationality as well ...³

Sex, for Foucault, became a police matter, something to be carefully regulated and ordered, a public matter, and a political matter. Along with the political realization that population implied power, the means of production of population (namely, sex), birth rates, marriages, and fertility all needed to be closely examined and controlled.

Sexual ‘perversions’ needed classification as well, needed to be drawn out of the shadows and named. Bullough lends credence to Foucault’s historical location of this activity, writing that though ‘homosexual activity and desire, have, I believe, existed in every society and time period, the concept of homosexuality is a nineteenth-century one.’⁴ We were interested no longer in just homosexual behaviour, but in the homosexual as a species, ‘a personage, a past, a case history’ with his sexuality ‘at the root of all his actions.’⁵ Out of this desire to instantiate sexuality with physical form arise Richard von Krafft-Ebing’s sadists and masochists and fetishists. No doubt scientists like Krafft-Ebing saw their labelling as part of a quest for knowledge, which in Foucault’s hands must become knowledge/power, and he writes that:

...this power ... acted by multiplication of singular sexualities ... It did not exclude sexuality, but included it in the body as a mode of specification of individuals ... It produced and determined the sexual mosaic.

The growth of ‘perversions’ in the nineteenth century is not an artefact of Victorian Puritanism and repressive morality, but the ‘encroachment of a type of power on bodies and their pleasures.’⁶ In the transfer of sexuality into scientific discourse, sex becomes a matter of truth. It is to be controlled, to be mastered, by science — as all aspects of nature are to be controlled.

We should have no trouble locating Kinsey within this uniquely Western tradition which Foucault refers to as a *scientia sexualis*, ‘an entire machinery for producing true discourses’ concerning sex.⁷ Kinsey was a true believer, a crusader for the power of science to cure social ills. I intend to argue that it is this characteristic of the man that has allowed his reputation to survive numerous attacks, and keeps him in high regard among modern scientists. There are no doubt practical reasons why Kinsey remains popular, some of which will be mentioned later on. But beyond his mere utility to researchers, there exists an attraction to Kinsey’s work that is harder to quantify. Kinsey represents an idealized notion of the scientific investigator, embodying qualities that sex researchers strive to imitate.

The memory of Kinsey serves an additional symbolic function in lay American culture. Radical conservatives like Billy Graham aside, most Americans view Kinsey as an enlightened reformer who opened eyes to the realities of what was going on in bedrooms across the country. Biographer

James H. Jones calls Kinsey 'the high priest of sexual liberation.'⁸ His sentiment is a common one. This sense of liberation, of opening-up, of freeing and de-stigmatising represents the persistent myth surrounding Kinsey's work. Drawing on Foucault's writing, we can begin to perceive that in actuality the Kinsey reports, at least at the level of societal institutions and power relationships, may have had exactly the opposite effect.

2. From Bug Collecting to the Cover of *TIME*

Wardell Pomeroy, Kinsey's colleague and an early biographer, offered a second generalization about Kinsey's personality: Not only was he a man full of paradoxes, his nature was fundamentally that of a collector.⁹ Kinsey started his academic career collecting gall wasps, millions of them, and achieved the status of an international authority on the insects. It's hard to believe that Foucault, who writes of sexuality being 'entomologised'¹⁰ thirty years after the publication of *Sexual Behaviour in the Human Male*, never mentions Kinsey, the entomologist.

It was in the midst of his research on gall wasps that Kinsey joined the faculty at Indiana University as a professor of zoology. When Indiana decided to create a marriage course in 1938, Kinsey was tapped to coordinate the project. By this route, Kinsey stumbled into one of the most significant and controversial scientific projects of the last century when he began recording the sexual histories of his students in the class. From that start, the larger project began to unfold in his mind. By the fall of 1940, Kinsey had already generated enough controversy on campus that he was forced to resign from teaching the course, and he devoted himself to collecting case histories.

Kinsey secured financial support from the prestigious Rockefeller Foundation to fund the work, and in 1947 established the Institute for Sex Research (now the Kinsey Institute) at Indiana. In 1948, *Sexual Behaviour in the Human Male* was published, becoming an almost immediate bestseller. Although the tone and presentation of the book were dry, reserved and academic, some of the results — such as the prevalence of homosexual experience (37 percent), masturbation (92 percent) and experience with prostitutes (69 percent) — were nothing short of shocking to the American public. The female volume brought more of the same (62 percent masturbated, almost 50 percent had engaged in premarital sex). In the broadest sense, Kinsey concluded that sexual variety was much greater and more widespread than anyone had thought.

The overwhelming success of the books brought Kinsey international fame. Popular controversies raged, stirred up by social conservatives who declared the books profane and immoral. Kinsey, fairly, ignored these critics. He showed much greater concern for the professional response, which was generally positive.¹¹ Most in academic circles found little to fault in Kinsey's conclusions — and even welcomed them — but a

number of serious questions were raised about his methods of collecting and analysing the data, a subject we'll turn to in the next section. Kinsey was by no means inattentive to the criticisms, but he typically rejected outright the complaints of these 'so-called scientists and clinicians' who 'expose their emotional selves' and are unable to 'face reality.'¹²

While Kinsey never conceded that there were any flaws in his method, some of the criticisms influenced the form of the female volume, making it a decidedly more careful and comprehensive book. Although it has never received as much attention as the male volume, the female book is generally regarded as the better study within the scientific community.¹³ *Sexual Behaviour in the Human Female* was published in 1953 to even more vehement denunciations in mainstream society. Under increasing pressure from moral interests, the Rockefeller Foundation bailed, officially explaining in August 1954 that the project 'was now in a position to obtain support from other sources.' Without the Foundation's funds, and with Kinsey's health declining, the project fizzled. Pomeroy called it the 'turning point in the project,' and eviscerates the Rockefeller Foundation for what he saw as their having 'simply quit, under pressure and out of fear, in direct contradiction to its frequently reiterated principles.'¹⁴ The constant fight to silence critics and collect ever more case histories had taken its toll on Kinsey physically. By 1954, Pomeroy describes him looking 'worn and his eyes were red-rimmed. He was having difficulty sleeping, he said, and was utterly exhausted.' Pomeroy blames Kinsey's critics for precipitating his death, which came not long after in 1956.¹⁵

3. Method and Critics

Criticisms have been levelled at almost every aspect of Kinsey's methodology, too many to recount here. Pomeroy writes, 'sometimes the list seemed endless.'

They thought we should have described the total sample, recorded the number who refused, listed specific questions, measured the resistance in each interview, compared the histories of volunteers and reluctant contributors, and measured the reliability of the coding of the interviewers. They claimed we needed more attitudinal data. Some complained that we did not list the questions our subjects asked, and had failed to provide a complete description of our procedures and methods ... The list went on ...¹⁶

And, indeed, Pomeroy's list does go on — for two thick paragraphs. His attempt to treat these concerns dismissively — many of them he never returns to in the remainder of his book — by getting them out in the open quickly,

like tearing off a Band-Aid, is humorous in its failure. The sheer weight of the list is overwhelming. Blow-by-blow each point raises a relevant question, and the aggregate effect seems to call into doubt the accuracy of Kinsey's results.

Temple University sociologist Julia Erickson has published a superb survey of Kinsey's scientific critics, dividing the complaints into four categories: defining and sampling the survey population, questionnaire design, interviewer training and interviewing, and data reduction and analysis.¹⁷ I'll follow her structure here in highlighting some of the key problems and responses from the Kinsey camp.

It's remarkable, given Kinsey's admonishment of earlier studies to achieve representative samples, how unrepresentative his own are. Kinsey strove for 100-percent sampling — a method he appropriated from his work with gall wasps — gathering the histories of all members of a particular group, be it a fraternity or a community of artists. He felt this would eliminate any complaint that his data would represent only the most exhibitionist and open personalities in the population. Of course, he had more luck achieving close to 100-percent sampling with groups of homosexuals living in Chicago than he did with groups of conservative Christians in rural Indiana.

The benchmark analysis of Kinsey's sampling methods remains the report by William Cochran, Frederick Mosteller, and John Tukey, compiled after the release of the male volume at the request of Kinsey's funding sources. The three prominent statisticians published their findings in the *Journal of the American Statistical Association* in December 1953, giving Kinsey's study a generally favourable review:

In a comparison with nine other leading sex studies ... [Kinsey's was] superior to all others ... In view of the limited statistical knowledge which was available to them, as made clear by the failure of their sample size experiment, KPM deserve much credit for the straight thinking which brought them safely by many pitfalls. Their need of adequate statistical assistance continues to be serious ... Unfortunately the sort of assistance which might resolve some of their most complex problems would require understanding, background, and techniques that perhaps not more than twenty statisticians in the world possess.¹⁸

Cochran et al. raised questions about Kinsey's cluster sample technique, suggesting a random sample might be more representative of the population and could help eliminate sample bias. Kinsey refused their advice. He felt

random sampling would be impractical, and believed that the large size of his sample meant he didn't need to rely on random data, though in reality several thousands of cases in a population of millions is nowhere near large enough to eliminate the statistical value of a random sample. Cochran et al. recognized that it's difficult to measure how closely the data retrieved from a non-random sample mirrors the target population:

Many of [Kinsey's] findings are subject to question because of a possible bias in the constitution of the sample ... These comments, which are not a criticism of [Kinsey's] research, emphasize the difficulty of answering the question: 'How accurate are the results?', which is naturally of great interest to any user of the results of a sex study.¹⁹

The makeup of the sample is problematic because it over-represents a number of groups at the expense of others. Among the males, college students, Midwesterners, homosexuals and prison inmates constitute a disproportionately large percentage of those surveyed. Kinsey did not worry that most of his blue-collar subjects had been incarcerated at some time since he 'assumed periodic incarceration was the normal plight of all working-class men.'²⁰ The running joke is that Kinsey's report was titled 'Sexual Behaviour in the Human Male,' when it would have been more appropriate to call it 'Sexual Behaviour in a few thousand white, middle-class, college-educated males living in the Midwestern United States.'

While the Cochran committee found plenty to criticize in Kinsey's statistics, they expressed a typical admiration for his interview. Most sources agree that while imperfect, Kinsey's interviewing technique required extraordinary talent and concentration on the part of the interviewer, and probably resulted in more good than harm. But if anyone would raise an eyebrow about Kinsey's 'deft and persistent' questioning, it would be Michel Foucault. For Foucault, the crucial technology for 'producing the truth of sex,' adapted from the Christian tradition, is the confession. Confession is a matter of compulsion, of forcing the subject to speak of sex, and to speak only 'the truth.' Confession is ascribed a therapeutic value, the telling of the truth of sex is described as a liberating, healing process.²¹ Perhaps most significantly, the systemization of sex as a scientific study reverses the direction of power, of the gaze, from the individual to the confessor, the examiner, and the interviewer. The production of the truth of sex is no longer a matter of the individual's experience, the scientist knows about 'truth,' and has methods and systems for determining it, for creating it, and can tease the truth out of his subject's experience. Kinsey represents the archetypal Foucauldian confessor. The sense of control Kinsey had as the possessor of

an individual's sexual history was palpable to many of his close associates and their families.²²

One additional, more general, area of criticism needs to be addressed: how Kinsey's inherent biases and assumptions — many of which he was likely unaware — influenced the direction and results of his research. Not surprisingly, the man has been accused of having all nature of social and political ends, and most of these accusations are completely unfounded. The one intention we can be sure of, and the one he openly professed, was to provide 'bases for sounder generalization about sexual behaviour' through the accumulation of 'scientific fact.' Kinsey believed in the objectivity of science, and thought the chief aim of research should be to achieve 'a mastery of the realities of the universe, or of any particular corner of it.'²³ This scientific naïveté may have been his greatest undoing, as it blinded him to the shortcomings of his work and to his personal prejudices. 'Kinsey did not recognize that his own social location created class, gender, and education biases that shaped his observations,' Erickson writes.²⁴ Finally, Kinsey never saw how his own ideas about sexuality might influence the conclusions of his study. It would seem that if he advocated, or at least accepted, sexual variety in his personal life, then it's no surprise he found sexual variety in his reports

4. Studying Sex after Kinsey

Taken together, the wide-ranging problems with Kinsey's methods paint a fairly damning portrait. Most sources happily credit Kinsey for his creative approaches to dealing with complex research obstacles, and his good scientific intentions. But, unfortunately, good intentions do not guarantee good research. In current practice, Kinsey's methods have been largely abandoned. Writing in 1972, Pomeroy relates that even the institute that bears Kinsey's name had deep-sixed collecting case histories:

The nature of the research itself has changed. The approach is sociological, and a whole new generation of researchers has been trained in a different way. Mass surveys are no longer considered worthwhile; the accepted form is hypothesis testing. No one thinks of going into a piece of research in the spirit Kinsey did, saying, 'Let's find out what's happening.' Now the researcher begins with a hypothesis, a framework, a model, and then he tests it. Thus Kinsey's grand design is gone.²⁵

During a 2008 interview in Bloomington, Kinsey Institute scientist Erick Janssen confirmed that much of today's research in the field remains hypothesis-based, with the notable exceptions of a number of AIDS studies.

The details of Kinsey's design are largely gone as well. Janssen said he knows of no one in the field who follows Kinsey's methods of sampling and recruiting, and no one who conducts a Kinsey-style interview — at least no one at the Institute does so. Janssen did say that Institute staff members are currently reviewing Kinsey's interview questions for possible inclusion in a new survey, although that survey will most likely be conducted online.²⁶

Kinsey's specific methods may have disappeared, but his results are still having a significant impact on work in the field. According to Janssen, researchers still make regular use of Kinsey's data, both in its published and raw form. Scientists at the Institute have digitised the mountains of data Kinsey collected from his interviews — much of which has never been analysed — and made it available to researchers around the globe, requesting in return only a citation in any published work. The appearance of such citations is not uncommon. 'There are tons of publications where you see [Kinsey's] name,' Janssen says.²⁷

We should now have some sense of the paradox that is Kinsey and his most famous research. Kinsey's approach to learning about sex has been assaulted from all sides, and has fallen out of favour among even his closest associates, yet those same people who have attacked him have also concluded that, by and large, he got it right. Now, if Kinsey actually did get it right (and we should remember that from the perspective of a science studies scholar, 'getting it right' refers to a relationship with the relevant community, not to some inherent connection to reality), he clearly didn't do so on the merits of his scientific rigor. If we tried to measure Kinsey's contributions based on how well they're supported by his total research program, we would probably have to conclude that he'd gotten it wrong. How do we go about explaining this disconnect between what our standard notion of scientific evaluation would seem to suggest, and what we've observed in the aftermath of the Kinsey reports? By today's standards, Kinsey conducted a poor scientific study. Of course, it is in no way fair to hold Kinsey to modern standards of sampling and statistical analysis. What look like elementary statistical errors today were pioneering efforts to deal with complex problems at the time. Janssen was quick to point out that on a number of topics, Kinsey's numbers are still the best available, and more recent studies have not had any more luck escaping criticism:

Part of what scientists do is being critical of methods ...
We're very good at shooting each other's work down ...
We're always critical. Sex researchers, all we do is argue
about numbers. We don't take any number seriously ...
That doesn't mean we throw them out the window.²⁸

So just because uncertainty exists about the validity of Kinsey's data doesn't mean his numbers can't continue to serve as a useful reference point. But the fondness sex researchers have for Kinsey's work goes beyond the mere lack of better alternatives. When asked what gave him confidence in the accuracy of Kinsey's findings, Janssen responded, 'The care he put into it. How careful he was in his thinking. And he was. He was so extremely detail oriented.'²⁹ Clearly, there is some feeling among sex researchers that Kinsey's meticulousness, his unfailing drive and effort, lends a certain amount of credence to his research. His work ethic is the sort which scientists aspire to — Janssen even remarked that Kinsey is a fine example for graduate students. For Foucault, the reasons for this admiration would be obvious. Kinsey represents a certain vision of science, a technique for bringing the unruliness of nature within our grasp. His studies are a landmark in the history of Foucauldian 'biopower.' As a purveyor of this specific sort of power, Kinsey's attractiveness to those who now carry that torch should be self-evident.

We would be wise to remember that Foucault's analysis seeks to identify the means by which power is distributed and leveraged within a given society; he is not out to make normative judgments about which structures and technologies of control are wrong or right (although reading between the lines we can intuit his wariness of the intensive disciplining of bodies he finds characteristic of modern Western culture). The *scientia sexualis* is neither a good nor an evil, but neither is it disinterested or objective. It cannot be untangled from the networks of power it both creates and perpetuates.

With Foucault's perspective, we can begin to see Kinsey in a new light, and understand why the influence of his work has persisted. It seems that contrary to the popular belief that Kinsey's work challenged the dominant Victorian repression of sex in American culture (such an idea of repression itself being a myth), it reinforced a structure of power relationships that requires definition and classification, that makes the individual confess and submit to the order of things so that power may be wrested from him to be employed in the production of truth. If it is scientists who are interested in this project, in the 'mastery of the realities of the universe, or of any particular corner of it,' then it makes perfect sense for Kinsey's work to be widely admired and his conclusions to be championed by the scientific community. Even Kinsey's detractors contribute to the overall goal of controlling by compelling the unspoken to come out into the light of science. 'Look,' they say, 'this is the sort of work that needs our attention. It cannot escape our gaze. It cannot be permitted sloppiness or be allowed to pass us by unimproved.'

The general sentiment toward Kinsey's work is one of great sympathy, as most of us sense that the man did much to comfort those who

felt their behaviour made them outcasts, reassuring them that they were, that we all are, in some way 'normal.' In this sense, Kinsey is credited for giving force to the women's and gay rights movements. The objectivity of science lent credence to the notion that the sexuality of these groups was not deviant or impure. People from all manner of backgrounds with all manner of lifestyles could look at Kinsey's data and see reflections of themselves, and be reassured that they were not alone. This is called 'freeing,' 'liberating,' and I guess in that it motivates us to political action perhaps it is. It certainly feels like a good result, with so many happy consequences. But this feeling of liberation may be a false façade, covering the mechanisms of power that further define us, compartmentalize us, commodify us as individual units but not individuals, and subjugate our bodies, our thoughts, our desires, to the production of truth. The solidifying of these discourses of power represents the interests and desires of individual actors only if our desire is to be controlled.

Notes

¹ V Bullough, 'Alfred Kinsey and the Kinsey Report: Historical Overview and Lasting Contributions,' *The Journal of Sex Research*, Vol. 35(2), May 1998, pgs. 127-131.

² Of Michel Foucault's incomplete, multi-volume *The History of Sexuality*, we're interested here only in the first installment, *Volume I: An Introduction*, Pantheon, New York, 1978.

³ Foucault, pgs. 23-24.

⁴ Bullough, Vern L. *Science in the Bedroom*. BasicBooks, 1994, p.33.

⁵ Foucault, p. 43.

⁶ Foucault, pgs. 47-48.

⁷ Foucault, p. 69.

⁸ J Jones, *Alfred C. Kinsey: A Public/Private Life*, W. W. Norton, New York, 1997, p. xi. The following line reads, 'His power derived from the cultural authority of science.' It's ironic that Jones, who even quotes *The History of Sexuality* in a later chapter, never seems to make the connection between Kinsey's research and Foucault's ideas about the disciplining power of scientific knowledge.

⁹ W Pomeroy, *Dr. Kinsey and the Institute for Sex Research*, Harper & Row, New York, 1972, p. 16.

¹⁰ Foucault, p. 43.

¹¹ This is a generally agreed-upon point in a number of sources, but see, in particular, Erdman Palmore's survey of sociologists in 'Published Reactions to the Kinsey Report,' *Social Forces*, Vol. 31(2), Dec. 1952, pgs. 165-172.

¹² Pomeroy, p. 284.

¹³ J Erickson, 'With Enough Cases, Why Do You Need Statistics? Revisiting Kinsey's Methodology.' *The Journal of Sex Research*, Vol. 35(2), May 1998, pgs. 132-140.

¹⁴ Pomeroy, p. 380-381.

¹⁵ Pomeroy, p. 359.

¹⁶ Pomeroy, p. 285-286.

¹⁷ I owe a significant debt to Erickson's analysis of the critics (see note 13 for the citation), and particularly for pointing out the significance of the reports by Cochran, Mosteller and Tukey and by Kinsey's own co-author Paul Gephard.

¹⁸ W Cochran et al., 'Statistical Problems with the Kinsey Report.' *Journal of the American Statistical Association*, Vol. 48(264), Dec. 1953, pgs. 673-716. See specifically pages 674-676.

¹⁹ Cochran et al., p. 675.

²⁰ Erickson, p. 134.

²¹ We can see the idea of liberation prominently at play in reactions to the Kinsey report. Notions of the therapeutic value of talking about sex achieve popularity later with the work of William Masters and Virginia Johnson.

²² Jones details the forcefulness with which Kinsey solicited his histories. A number of Indiana students complained that they felt pressured into an interview, and several of the wives of Kinsey's colleagues expressed discomfort with his requirement that all members of his staff (and ideally their families as well) provide their histories to the project.

²³ A Kinsey et al., *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*. W.B. Saunders Company, Philadelphia, 1948, pgs. 33-34.

²⁴ Erickson, p. 132.

²⁵ Pomeroy, p. 461.

²⁶ From the author's interview with Erick Janssen at the Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction, Bloomington, Indiana, August 2008.

²⁷ Author's interview with Janssen.

²⁸ Author's interview with Janssen.

²⁹ Author's interview with Janssen.

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PART IV

Sexuality and Aesthetics

The Big 'O' in Opera

Carlo Zuccarini

Abstract

Sexuality and eroticism are present in all of opera's interwoven 'layers', broadly: drama, music and singing. Interaction with the resulting whole evokes an emotional response in the listener/audience that is erotic in nature. Lacanian psychoanalytic theory pertaining to the gaze and, in particular, the voice provides a useful framework to explore the sexuality and eroticism within and beyond opera. This exploration will focus primarily on the voice and the dramatic narrative 'layer' with reference to the erotic nature of a listener's pleasure in response to the operatic voice. Neuroscientific research has found that the 'reward system' of the brain - among other areas - is activated when listening to music; some of the same areas are activated as those during sex. In addition, music is processed by some of the same areas as language. These findings may provide support for Lacanian theory as applied to opera, as well as indirect support for the erotic nature of a listener's pleasure in the quest to (re-)encounter the lost vocal object. This neuropsychanalytic approach reviews the author's ongoing research that attempts to gain insight into the way in which opera is processed in the mind and brain.

Key Words: Opera, voice, lost vocal object, jouissance, sexuality, eroticism, psychoanalysis, neuroscience.

1. Introduction

This essay discusses and is based on the author's previous and ongoing research.¹ The neuropsychanalytic framework of this ongoing research attempts to combine (Lacanian) psychoanalytic theory and neuroscientific knowledge to gain further insight into the way in which vocal music in general, and opera in particular, are processed in the mind and brain of the listener/audience.

As the author's research is still in progress, and in view of its broad scope, this essay is not intended to be a definitive study. Rather, it focuses on some aspects of sexuality that are present within and beyond the narrative and vocal elements of opera - primarily, although not exclusively, operas of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries - and the erotic nature of the resulting pleasure experienced by the listener/audience.

These concepts are discussed within the context of the various layers of opera (drama, music and singing) and specifically the way in which the

individual elements of narrative, music and the voice relate to opera. The combined effect of these individual elements is analysed to arrive at a possible interpretation of the way in which the listener/audience relates to opera.

The 'operatic orgasm', as described by Abel,² is a point of confluence where the various 'layers' of opera produce a 'high' in the listener/audience. When this coincides with a particular type of pleasure evoked exclusively by the voice, mediated by the music, narrative and stage apparatus, then the listener/audience experiences *jouissance* - what is being proposed here as 'the big O'. The almost unbearably extreme pleasure of *jouissance* produces an unusual 'mental space' that can occur in response to the operatic voice. This special state is characterised by powerful emotions, such as a sense of loss, bliss, ecstasy, sadness, rapture, or feeling inexplicably 'choked up' or 'tearful', which are evoked in response to the vocal object yet independently of the emotive colour of a given operatic passage.

All of these elements are explored with reference to psychoanalytic theory relating to the gaze and, in particular, the voice as partial lost objects. In addition, to complement this theory, neuroscientific knowledge is brought into play to explain how listening to music activates the brain's reward and pleasure systems, among many other areas. Of particular interest for the purposes of this research, music is processed by some of the same areas as language and activates some of the same areas as eating or sexual intercourse.

2. The Layers of Opera

Opera consists of three main elements, or 'layers'. These can be defined broadly as: narrative (the libretto or lyrics), music (the score) and singing (the vocal performance by the singers of the lyrics in the libretto according to the musical score).

The narrative serves three basic functions. Firstly, it provides material for the storyline. Secondly, it allows the development of an appropriate dramatic structure and forward progression. Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly for the purposes of this exploration, the way in which the narrative is put to use serves to justify the presence of the orchestra and singers. The narrative not only provides a framework for musical variation of climax and anti-climax, it justifies the operatic voice itself. The dramatic structure is put to the service of the music and, ultimately, to the voice.

The notoriously complex plots of opera (the narrative 'layer'), just like the lavishness of its sets (the visual 'layer'), perform the dual function of developing and adding to the dramatic interest and pathos, whilst at the same time concealing the audience's ultimate progression towards the infinite void of vocal *jouissance*. Indeed, when enraptured listeners reach the point of *jouissance* mediated by the voice as object, they close their eyes to the stage

apparatus that has led their gaze to the point of infinity and terminates in the void, that is, the point at which the void begins. Everything else up to that point *outside* of or *around* the voice as object (which, on account of it being a lost object, is in itself a lack and thus a void) has actually contributed to the momentum, the crescendo required to achieve the ‘pure cry’. The significance of the ‘pure cry’, which is the interface between the performer and the listener/audience, is discussed below.

3. The Voice as Object

The ‘pure cry’ as object of *jouissance* is Lacan’s *objet petit a*, as discussed by Poizat in relation to opera.³ When the ‘pure cry’ is achieved, the opera-lover experiences a melting away of everything else outside of the voice (the visual order), including the singer’s body itself, and becomes lost in the voice. The opera-lover identifies with the voice as it becomes a vocal object and deep emotion is aroused (*jouissance*) that can only find expression in a breathless sob signifying absolute loss.⁴ During such moments of *jouissance*, the operatic voice becomes an incorporeal object, the lost ‘pure cry’, fleeting in its evanescence like the pleasure of orgasm.

A. What is the ‘Pure Cry’ and Why is it Lost?

According to Lacanian theory, a baby who is dependent on the ‘Other’ (a parent or guardian) for the satisfaction of his/her needs emits an empty cry in reaction to some displeasure or need that s/he is experiencing. This cry is then given a meaning by the Other, who responds to the cry and provides satisfaction in some form, based on the Other’s interpreted meaning. This satisfaction, as well as the associated details of the situation, leaves a trace in the baby’s mind with a link to his/her cry. Prior to this attribution of meaning, the baby’s cry was a ‘pure cry’ that had not entered the signifying order (language) of the Other. The Other can only experience the baby’s cry as a demand, a ‘cry for’ something. As soon as meaning is attributed to the baby’s cry, the ‘purity’ of the cry is lost, as every subsequent cry will have signification as speech. However, the initial *jouissance* experienced by the baby at his/her first cry can never be repeated, it becomes lost, as the subsequent situation and satisfaction provided by the Other will not match the initial trace of the baby’s experience. In this way, the sound of the voice, the ‘pure cry’ devoid of meaning, becomes a partial lost object when the baby enters the realm of language through the desire of the Other, and as such becomes the object of a drive in the (impossible) quest to recapture it.

B. Where Does the ‘Pure Cry’ Occur in Opera?

It is paradoxical that the ‘dialogic’ and ‘multi-layered’⁵ qualities of opera, which makes use of words and music, images and sound, disappear at the moments of most intense emotion, or vocal *jouissance*. At these times,

the signifying order can be said to fall away.⁶ When the voice as object achieves the status of 'pure cry', the visual order ceases to exist, albeit momentarily. However, as Poizat explains, the lavishness or complexity of the *mise-en-scène* is an integral element, in that it serves to create a perspective leading to a point of emptiness, by preventing a certain immediacy.⁷ As a result, those parts of the action which are most significant can take place around this point, the void around which art revolves, according to Lacan.⁸

The 'pure cry' in opera can be found where the voice becomes 'a pure unarticulated scream'⁹ and is no longer subject to the law of language and sometimes even to the structure of music. This typically occurs at the higher registers of the voice. It follows, then, that the moment of vocal *jouissance* that the opera-fan craves is necessarily to be found in the higher registers of the soprano, where language disintegrates, becomes incomprehensible and is thereby transformed into pure voice, or 'pure cry'. The soprano's voice stands in place of the object itself, which is thus reduced to nothingness - she fills the lack and is the locus of lack itself. Being characterised by a lack herself, as Poizat explains, woman in opera is the natural locus from which the quest begins for the vocal object.¹⁰

The constant quest for the elusive (female) vocal object of desire and the resulting *jouissance* of the 'pure cry' is what drives the repetition compulsion of the committed opera fan. As Poizat claims, the most extreme followers of opera, naturally enough, are men.¹¹ Therefore, woman as voice becomes the cause of man's desire in being able to fill the lack.¹² However, the quest to recover the vocal object is impossible, just as impossible as man's desire being satisfied by woman as voice, and so the quest becomes endless. The impossibility of this desire being fully satisfied creates a feeling of disappointment and yearning for more - a phallic *jouissance* - as any satisfaction that can be achieved from the elusive vocal object is fleeting.¹³ This endless quest would account to some extent for the fact that, despite a potentially vast repertory, opera houses can survive by repeatedly producing the same 'popular' operas.

4. Sexuality in Opera

Given the vastness of the operatic repertoire, only a few examples can be included here to illustrate some aspects of sexuality within the narrative 'layer' of opera.

A. Love and Sexuality

Freud's statement that 'we are never so defenceless against suffering as when we love, never so helplessly unhappy as when we have lost our loved object or its love'¹⁴ provides an apt description of the suffering that can be found in many opera plots. Freud's statement explains the element of

unhappiness and suffering, although it does not fully account for the powerful force of romantic jealousy - a form of power and control of the Other - that inhabits opera.

Love and sexuality in opera often overlap the public, political and social aspects in which they occur. These two dramatic elements are closely bound in a constant interplay, each affecting and *being* affected by the other. A parallel example of this can be found in Verdi's *Rigoletto* and Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, where politics, power, love and sexuality are all interwoven and come together in the figures of the Duke of Mantua and Don Giovanni, respectively. Both of these characters occupy powerful positions and are libertines *because* of their power. They abuse their power in order to indulge their sexual desires and they represent the 'old order of absolute privilege.'¹⁵ In addition, they both represent independence, each being 'his own legislator, obedient only to his own desire.'¹⁶ Because of their power, they can indulge their desires by seeking out what is prohibited in relation to the symbolic law.¹⁷ They take the pleasure principle to its extreme.¹⁸ They literally live by Lacan's 'not giving way on one's desire.'¹⁹ Unlike Don Giovanni, the Duke of Mantua does not pursue his way of life willingly and knowingly to the point of death, nor does he get his just desserts in the operatic space.²⁰ We can assume that the Duke continues to indulge himself even when the curtain of the last act has fallen, if it were not for the fact that there is no more music to carry him beyond this dramatic endpoint. However, when we leave the opera house, the Duke lives on in our minds through the voice and music, rather than the drama that provided the narrative reason for their existence. Although the Duke does not have a leading role in the narrative plot, in terms of his presence on the stage, or holding us captive through the pathos of the action in which he is involved, all events nonetheless revolve around him even in his absence. The Duke is present by virtue of his absence. Like the visual order in opera, the most intense vocal elements that are related to him occur when he is not present.

Moving on from libertinage as a privilege or abuse of power to love and sexuality as a means to obtain or change the course of power, opera contains many examples in which love is doomed because it involves a conflict between national and political loyalties.²¹ Salecl and Žižek, in the context of Lacan's thesis that 'There is no sexual relationship', state that love does not exist as 'just love' but is a 'field on which battles for power and domination are fought.'²² Only by avoiding its consummation can authentic love become possible, while the rejection of a love-object is the only way in which its dignity is maintained. Once again, examples abound in opera where 'true love, or 'pure love', becomes such by its renouncement. Although this is usually mediated by external factors, such as a father's wish, class differences, political interests and so forth. On the other hand, this is often linked with arranged or coerced marriages, whereby love and sexuality

become an instrument of power. There is often a conflict between love and duty,²³ as for example in Verdi's *Aida*.

B. Sexuality and Bonding

Beyond the normative love and heterosexuality that are routinely portrayed in opera, there are numerous occurrences of bonding between male characters in the form of friendships or relationships based on love/hate.²⁴ In psychoanalytic terms, Freud accounts for such bonding as 'desexualised, sublimated homosexual love for other men, which springs from work in common'²⁵ and 'homosexual tendencies... [that] help to constitute the social instincts, thus contributing an erotic factor to friendship and comradeship.'²⁶ This type of attachment between men was identified by Sedgwick in nineteenth-century literature²⁷ - which provided the narrative for many opera libretti - and can be defined as 'homosocial' bonding.²⁸ A good example of this can be found in Verdi's *Don Carlo*, in which Don Carlo and Rodrigo are assigned the scenes that in romantic opera usually belong to lovers.²⁹

An interesting example of homosocial bonding in which love turns to hate can be found in Verdi's *Otello*, in which Shakespeare's hints of homosexual desire have been replaced in the libretto by Iago's fear of losing power. However, Iago can still be perceived as seeking revenge for being scorned by Otello, and both men are finally united in their desire to eliminate Desdemona, the woman who separates them. Benvenuto describes the dynamic of jealousy that might be at work in *Otello* as 'the atrocious doubt that the beloved woman's cavity is 'inhabited' by another man's phallus.'³⁰ Consequently, sexual intercourse between Otello and Desdemona would involve 'a kind of homosexual encounter with the other's [Cassio's] phallus.'³¹ Although Otello can be seen as being afraid of losing Desdemona as his love-object, more than this, he cannot accept her enjoyment of sex with Cassio to his own exclusion, so he would rather lose her as a love-object by murdering her.³²

There are many instances in which homosocial bonding between men is mediated by women. Woman is often the cause of the bond and just as often the cause of it being turned into a relationship of hate. Although it is not possible to say to what extent the component of homosexual desire is present in the characters who form these homosocial bonds. Nor is it possible to establish the extent to which such a bond involves the transfer to another man, in a sublimated form, of the desire for a woman.³³

This dynamic of mediation does not occur in the less prevalent instances of female homosocial bonding in opera, such as the rivalry based on repressed desire between Eboli and Elisabetta in Verdi's *Don Carlo*. This may be due to the fact that more passive roles are assigned to female characters.³⁴

5. Sex, (Neuro-)Science and Song - Why Opera is Enjoyed

As briefly outlined above, sexuality is an element that is present in many of the 'layers' that characterise opera. Abel claims that opera produces a delimited space which allows for sexual transgression to be portrayed, to the extent that this transgression, or perversion as he puts it, actually fuels opera and is inherent in the way the audience relates to it.³⁵ The 'operatic orgasm' itself is like 'an elaborate form of exhibitionistic group sex.'³⁶ However, the sexual transgressions portrayed by opera remain safely within the bounds of the stage. They are visible, but at the same time concealed, and cannot impact real life. The audience has power over the characters on the stage by recognising their transgressions, yet at the same time the audience can overlook that power temporarily and participate in the fantasy.³⁷

The erotic nature of the relationship between the listener/audience and opera can be said to exist on several levels, but primarily in the encounter with the soprano's voice as the ultimate object of desire, a quest for vocal *jouissance* that is endless in its impossibility. Although moments of sexual *jouissance* in opera may be looked upon as a figurative release of sexual tension,³⁸ as Abel's expression 'operatic orgasm' would appear to imply,³⁹ the fleeting and elusive nature of any satisfaction that the vocal object may produce only results in disappointment and yearning for more⁴⁰ - the phallic *jouissance* that was mentioned above. Therefore, the operatic voice can be said to produce the opposite effect: it maintains a constant desire driven by eros. As C. S. Lewis remarked: 'Eros includes other things besides sexual activity' and 'Sexual experience can occur without Eros.'⁴¹ The erotic nature of the pleasure experienced by the listener/audience appears to be mediated by the voice of the mortal soprano who, like Psyche in mythology, subsequently becomes immortal when she is raised up to the status of a *diva* by the listener/audience (Zeus) through their desire (Eros) for her voice as object.

Interestingly, this repetition compulsion may be linked to the neuroscientific explanation of the way in which we enjoy music. Listening to music involves the activation of numerous brain regions, including those associated with reward, motivation, emotion and arousal, namely: the auditory cortex, frontal regions, mesolimbic dopamine system (in which the nucleus accumbens has an important role, as described below), cerebellum and basal ganglia.⁴²

As described by Levitin,⁴³ when we listen to music, the auditory cortex receives the incoming signals from the ear and processes the various sound frequencies. In addition, there are extra connections from the ear that are linked directly to the cerebellum, a supplementary auditory system that allows fast response to sound based on emotion and with resulting movement, such as flight.⁴⁴ The timbres of the music are identified in the temporal lobe, while the hippocampus and other areas located between the

temporal, occipital and parietal lobes are involved in the retrieval and identification of memories of similar sounds that we may have heard in the past. Further areas are activated when processing pitch, rhythm and emotion.⁴⁵

Emotion evoked by music is processed in the frontal lobes, cerebellum, amygdala and nucleus accumbens, which are part of a system of brain regions that are associated with pleasure and reward, for example related to eating or sexual intercourse.⁴⁶ The nucleus accumbens is central to the brain's 'reward system' in that it releases dopamine, which is related to the motivation for rewards (wanting), as opposed to the pleasure of the rewards themselves (liking), so the nucleus accumbens is also involved in addiction.⁴⁷ Research has found that the nucleus accumbens and other areas contain 'hedonic opioid hot spots' that are related to the dopaminergic system and 'wanting', by contributing to reward motivation, in that they are responsible for enhancing the 'liking' that results from sensory pleasure.⁴⁸

When we listen to the words in opera (and other vocal music), these are processed by the language system, including Broca's area and Wernicke's area, among others in the temporal and frontal lobes.⁴⁹ Interestingly, the structure of music is also processed in the frontal regions of the brain that are associated with language, which indicates that music possesses similar properties to language.⁵⁰ Perhaps this explains why we tend to focus a great deal on the higher notes when listening to music, given that most of the energy that is released by consonants in speech is within the same range as most melodies.⁵¹

These neuroscientific descriptions of the way in which we hear/listen to, process and enjoy music through the brain's reward and pleasure systems provide a neurochemical interpretation of how physiological responses, such as 'chills' and 'shivers',⁵² as well as powerful affective responses,⁵³ can be evoked by music.

Therefore, being a sensory experience, listening to music is *sensuous*. In addition, given that music is processed in some of the same areas of the brain that are activated by eating and sexual intercourse, this would also make it a *sensual* experience, and as such potentially erotic.

In an ongoing online study that is being conducted by the author,⁵⁴ a preliminary review of raw data collected to date revealed that a large number of respondents who indicated opera as their preferred genre of vocal music claim that the vocal elements of opera evoke sensual feelings within them. A large number of respondents also confirmed that they experience a range of intense feelings including a sense of bliss, loss, ecstasy and sadness, or feeling choked up and tearful in response to the operatic voice - *jouissance* by any other name. Surprisingly, a large number of respondents disagree that the pleasure of listening to the soprano or tenor voice has something erotic about it. This is surprising in that a number of respondents claim to feel

sexual attraction to a singer on the basis of the voice alone, independently of the singer's appearance. This would imply, based on the raw data alone, that an element of the sensual and the erotic is at work in the opera-listening dynamic, but that the listener is largely unaware (perhaps by denial?) of the erotic element. However, as Barthes noted, the response to art in general - and therefore to the singing voice - involves erotic pleasure with climactic instances of *jouissance*; it defies rational judgment, so that the only judgment can be '*that's it!* And further still: *that's it for me!*'⁵⁵

6. Conclusion

According to Freud, drama serves the purpose of arousing 'sympathetic suffering' in order to 'purge the emotions' by opening up 'sources of pleasure or enjoyment in our emotional life'⁵⁶. In addition to providing an outlet to discharge emotions through enjoyment, the affect that is aroused by drama is accompanied by sexual excitation, which allows us to experience the sensation that the potential of our psychical state has been raised. Freud also proposed that sensations of pleasure and unpleasure are determined by variations in the strength of rhythmic movement.⁵⁷ Motion in music can be said to provide a framework that allows for an awareness of feelings.⁵⁸ The silences in the music mould the sound to create various depths in feeling.⁵⁹ The rise and fall in pitch, the forward movement, the crescendo, climax and anti-climax of music in general, and within the narrative/musical/vocal multi-layered structure of opera in particular, reinforce and maintain the erotic nature of the pleasure derived by the opera listener.

Therefore, a consistent erotic tension is produced and maintained by the whole operatic experience mediated by the libretto, the stage set, the orchestra and, most importantly, the unmediated 'pure cry' of the voice. Consequently, the aim of the audience's desire is achieved in identifying with the voice as object - independently of the affective colour of the musical passage and any possible external associations to it. This is the climactic moment of *jouissance* that Abel defines as the 'operatic orgasm' of Romantic opera.⁶⁰ Indeed, Abel goes as far as to claim that the 'operatic orgasm' parallels sexual intercourse even in terms of the time that it takes (approximately seven to ten minutes): from the foreplay of the prelude that creates musical tension, to the development or crescendo and finally the climax, followed by a calm postlude.⁶¹

The findings of neuroscientific research appear to link and explain the various elements that are involved in listening to music: physical response, emotion, memory, language, motion, and so forth. However, research is still being carried out in distinguishing the processes involved in 'liking' as opposed to 'wanting'. As this present research about the operatic voice continues, an interesting confluence is apparent between

psychoanalytic theory and neuroscientific knowledge. The point of convergence may involve both music and language. During moments of *jouissance* (typically in the higher registers), the voice can be said to 'transgress' the order of language, and sometimes even the structure of music, going beyond meaning to become voice as object. As we listen to music, the brain attempts to predict the structure by synchronising with the beats, or the structure of music. When these predictions are correct, the brain derives satisfaction; when this expectation is violated, the brain takes pleasure in the interesting exception.⁶²

Given that music (and therefore opera) is processed in a similar way to language and that 'emotion is a primary pathway to establishing meaning in music,'⁶³ with meaning outside of language apparently 'processed in a domain-general fashion, which is dedicated to actions, voices as well as music,'⁶⁴ there appears to be an overlap here between psychoanalytic theory and neuroscience as applied to the *jouissance* of opera: transgression of the order of language and violation of the structure of music as predicted by the brain. This would seem to be the point at which the listener/audience identifies most intensely with the vocal object, irrespectively of the affective colour of the operatic passage.

Notes

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PART V

Identities

The Fluidity of Sexual Identities: Negotiations and Performances in Phone Sex Work

Giulia Selmi

Abstract

By using a postmodern approach both to identity and sexuality, this contribution is aimed at exploring how female professional phone sex workers engage in identity work in order to create and negotiate their identity both in their private life as women and in the workplace as workers, by reproducing and resisting the dominant discourses on prostitution and sexuality. From an empirical point of view the research draws on a case study within one organization that supplies sexual phone services to men by female operators. A qualitative methodology has been used existing in participant observation, shadowing and in-depth interviews.

Key Words: Sex work, sexuality, identity, identity work, stigma.

1. Introduction

The word sex work defines a range of different business activities (street work, house-based work, phone sex, escort etc.) that consists in a consensual exchange of sexual services for money. Despite in contemporary western societies, from a legal point of view, sex work is becoming more and more a *job like another* that is one has to pay taxes, has a formal labour contract and so on, rather than workers, women engaged in this activity are still framed as *outsiders*¹. Thus, for those who work in the sex industry, the question of identity is a very controversial issue because in the process of making sense of self as workers, one has to cope with the whole negative social meanings attributed to prostitution, with what has been called 'the whore stigma'².

This stigma positions sex workers in a range of discourses constructed around the notion of sexuality: for instance the one of *immorality* that entails a notion of sexuality only within an emotional relation or the one of *commodification* that, considering sexuality as the place where the true and inner self is based, conceptualises the selling of sex as a selling of the self. Moreover, this stigma has a wider social meaning that disciplines women's sexual behaviours whether they do or not sex work. The risk to be considered a 'whore' is not run exclusively by those who sell sexual services for money, but it is a social archetype that disciplines the sexuality of all women in terms of their sexual reputation and honour³. For instance, having sex out of marriage or dressing sexy are social behaviours that can make one women

fall in the *bad girl* category. Thus, Prostitute is also a social status that marks women distinctly: it is something women *are*, besides something women *do* as a work. By using a postmodern approach both to identity and sexuality, this contribution is aimed at exploring how female professional phone sex workers engage in identity work in order to create and negotiate their identity both in their private life as women and in the workplace as worker by upsetting and re-framing the dominant discourses on prostitution and sexuality. Therefore, in this paper I will explore first how they cope with and reproduce the whore stigma as a moral category in order to make sense of themselves in their private life as *good girls*. Afterwards, I will turn my attention to how they manage their identity of workers of the sex industry by creating one or more characters specific for the phone work through which they perform as *professional*.

2. Identity and Sexuality: A Theoretical Framework

For long time modernity placed the self at the epicentre of meanings. Indeed, the modern self could not exist without a subjective presence that outweighed and controlled the objects of its surroundings. By possessing this presence, the modern self came to be treated as something distinct with the power to control its own thoughts and influence its relationships with external objects. However, in recent decades postmodern approaches suggested to consider identity neither as a fixed ontological property of the subject nor as an essence at the heart of the rational self, but as a fluid, fragmentary and fragile process in which people engage through social interaction⁴. Therefore, identity becomes a relational concept and the ongoing processes of identity-making are carried out through language: individuals shape their identities making use of the available linguistic and symbolic resources in the context and by positioning⁵ themselves always in relation to others individuals. The self is no longer defined as a consistent conglomeration of attitudes and perceptions strung together by the power of reason. Neither is behaviour necessarily considered an outcome of clear intentions. The identity of the postmodern self does not have a centre. As Sarup puts such an identity is

‘a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings blend and clash...[and] not an object which stands by itself and which offers the same face to each observer in each period’⁶

In this sense, in this paper I will consider identity not as a static and individual dimension, ‘something we are’, but rather as a processual and manifold dimension, ‘something we do’ with others⁷ and that it is performed

in specific situations and places, a fluid variable which shifts and changes in different contexts and at different times⁸.

Sexuality as well underwent the same epistemological shift. Postmodernism, in fact, invites to consider sexuality not as a biologically constituted and naturally determined entity that confine the possibility of action and existence of human beings, nor as a place where the 'true' self is kept, but as a plastic entity manufactured by and within the language: sexuality thus is socially and discursively constructed as well. According to Gagnon and Simon⁹ we can look at sexuality through a theatrical metaphor, a social constructed script, *a sexual script*, which is learned through language and communication and afterwards performed through it. As the self of symbolic interactionism, sexuality emerges through interaction in order to be performed by individuals¹⁰. The analytical metaphor of sexual script is in use to underline the theatrical and ritual nature of sexual interactions as well as to show how the actors and actress involved could not share the same drama. Similar performances, in fact, can assume different meanings for the persons involved in the interaction or different meanings can be ascribed to the same act according to the specific context where it is performed. Therefore, in this paper I will consider sexuality as an emerging activity, as a set of actions that are accountable only within a relational context and where this set, which is always situated, never univocally fixes the identities of the subjects involved. With this perspective both identity and sexuality are situated performances that are differently enacted depending on the context in terms of space, time and audience.

However, despite the fluidity invoked for all human beings in the times of postmodernity, *being a whore* seems to be still a sort of ontological and fixed feature of womanhood. By the other, sex workers are required exactly this fluidity in order to manage the different realms of their life and they are forced to cope with the *whore stigma* in order to do it. In this paper, thus, I will explore how identity and sexuality are differently performed by phone sex worker in their private and working dimensions. According to Brewis and Linstead¹¹ have argued I will do it by looking to the micro-practice of the organization in sex work and its complexity and resistance to dominant discourses both on prostitution and sexuality.

3. Research Setting and a Note on Method

The account presented in this paper comes from observation of home-based phone sex workers working for a company located in a big city in the south of Italy. Phone sex is a type of virtual sex that refers to sexually explicit conversations between two or more persons via telephone where at least one of the participants masturbates or engages in sexual fantasies. However, customer of these services may call not only to have a sexual conversation, but also to fulfil some other needs such as a sense of nurturing,

sympathy or other forms of emotional intimacy. Commercial phone sex services offer this sexual experience over the phone through premium-rate telephone numbers or telephone numbers for calls during which certain services are provided and for which prices higher than normal are charged. Unlike a normal call, in premium-rate ones part of the call charge is paid to the service provider, thus enabling businesses to be funded via the calls. So in these services, workers don't have any economic transaction with costumers, but they receive a salary from the sex phone company they work for proportioned to the number of calls they do¹². Finally the call can be answered both in a call centre and in worker houses through a call transfer from a general switchboard managed by the company.

Since phone sex workers have no contact with the client neither in physical terms nor in money ones, the sexual services they sell are not legally considered forms of prostitution which in Italy is licit but not legal¹³ and they are controlled by the telecommunication regulations. However, they are part of the Italian sex industry and they inhabit the same symbolic universe. They are a border area of the sex industry, so to say, both from a cultural and a legal viewpoint. In fact, from a cultural perspective, phone sex work escape from one of the most controversial issue within the debate on sex work, both academic and not, that is the selling of one 'real' body¹⁴: sex is sold, but through technology and voice, without any corporeal involvement with the costumer. Besides, from a legal point of view, in Italy phone sex work is the only one recognized as a proper work. However, even if their work is legal, even if they have a labour contract and even if they don't have any corporeal involvement with patrons, women working in this sector of the sex industry are framed in the same symbolic imaginary and they have to cope with the same dominant narratives other sex workers do in order to manage their work identity. Therefore, this border positioning of phone sex work is particularly intriguing in order to grasp how female workers in the sex industry create and negotiate their personal and professional identity moving from and toward the dominant discourses on prostitution.

The sex phone company I observed consists in three women aged 25- 45 working in their houses, of whom two of them live and work in the same house. They run four lines at the same time and they supply services for male costumers only¹⁵. They worked from 8 o'clock in the morning till 12 pm with three shifts of five or six hours each. They worked in their own houses so the working hours were interrelated with their daily and non-working life: concerning to the process of identity making, this was a very interesting point that allowed me to observe how their narratives and practices shifted from the working to the personal setting and vice versa. During my observation I met only once the man in charge of the company who attends only to the advertisements and economic tasks of the company, without any involvement in the calls, the core activities of the company. As a

paradox, they had contact only over the phone. Access to the field was negotiated directly with the workers with the approval of the owner while the costumers didn't know I was there.

I used a case study research strategy¹⁶ through qualitative data collection techniques and analysis. Data collection involved the use of participant observation and interviews. Observation took the form of following two workers in their shifts of works, staying in their house and observing them both in their working life, namely the calls, and in their private one. The workers were encouraged to talk of their working activities and I asked additional questions probing particular issues. Finally, in order to ensure the anonymity of the people concerned, the name of the women are totally imaginary as well as each reference to specific place or situation. The italics represent the direct discourse transcribed from field notes or audio-taped interviews.

4. Creating and Negotiating Identity in Phone Sex Work

Sara and Lara work as phone sex workers from their house. They have two cordless phone connected to the general switchboard of the company through which they manage four erotic lines at the same time¹⁷. However, the phone do not ring all the time and they usually do other things while working such as cooking, watching a movie, meeting friends or the boyfriend, surfing the Internet and so on. Obviously, during the period of observation, talking with me was one of the 'other things' they were doing. Thus, since the fluid feature of the working activity, they perform simultaneously different identities without any change of time or setting in an ongoing shifting from their 'personal' identity to their 'professional' one as I will explore in the following paragraphs.

4.1 Good Girls and Bad Girls: Coping with the Prostitute Archetype

In this paragraph, I will account for the identity work the phone sex workers I observed engage in order to avoid the moral condemnation and nefarious stereotypes linked to the Prostitute archetype: more precisely I argue that they use exactly this archetype to define their values and practices around sexuality in their private lives in order to create a private identity of 'good girls', as it is shown in these examples.

As long as they work in their house, they usually receive friends while working and Sara in particular because she manages the evening shift. One regular guest in the evening is Marta, the sixteen years old daughter of a couple of neighbours. Her parents come back home after work at 8.30 pm while she finishes her afternoon activities at school at 18.30 pm, so she is used to spend this period of time in Sara's home. Sara is not her formal baby-sitter¹⁸, but they have a sort of care relation similar to the one an older sister has with the younger. The first time I saw Marta I was really upset because it

was my first day of observation and I thought Sara wouldn't have start working since Marta was there. I was wrong: Sara connected the work phones and calls started to arrive. During my period of observation in the early evening the usual setting was Marta telling Sara and me lots of 'teenager stories' about school, friends, holidays, diets and so on and Sara giving her advices and comments on each topic between one call and the other. Marta is the only one among neighbours who knows that Sara and Lara work as phone sex workers. I understood they have a sort of agreement about that: Marta keeps the secret in exchange for the possibility to do things she can't do with her parents such as drinking beer or smoking cigarettes; Sara wants the secret to be kept '*because, you know, here people is not very open minded, if they would know the work we do, they would think at once we are whores*'. In Sara understanding *being a whore* is not connected to the kind of working activity one does in order to gain money, but is a sort of moral category that one has to avoid in order to keep women respectability safe.

In her interactions with Marta this aspect is very evident. For instance, once Marta arrived home wearing a black dress and high heels in order to go to a birthday party of a friend. She wanted to know if she was fine, if the dress fitted her because at the party she was supposed to meet a boy she liked. In her comments and advices, Sara was really severe. She didn't like the dress, in her opinion it was too low-necked for a girl of Marta's age, *it makes you look like a whore* as Sara puts it and she made her put a black jacket on in order to be more sober and cover the neckline. Besides, she was really worried for Marta sexual encounters during the party and she gave her lots of advices in order to persuade her to *behave as the girl you are, not as the whore you seem with this dress*. This is one of the examples¹⁹ where Sara uses and reproduces the archetype of the prostitute as a tool to draw a line between good girls and bad girls in relation to sexuality and sexual behaviours. By one hand, this line is needed to socialize Marta, which is a novice in womanhood, at how women are culturally expected to perform their sexual identity in order to do not fall in the bad girl category. By the other, drawing this line positions Sara herself on the right side of the dichotomy, as a good girl in her private and affective life.

Another example comes from the relation Sara has with her boyfriend. Marco is a chemist, he works for a big company of biotechnologies and they are engaged for one year. He knows Sara is a phone sex worker, but he doesn't care, he admits it was a problem at the beginning of their relation because *I felt bad thinking all those men talking with my girlfriend, but in the end it is a work, she just receives calls, I don't care, she stays home, she talks over the phone, that's all. She's not a whore because she does this work, is she?* As it is for Sara, in Marco account being a whore is not defined by the explicit sexual content of the working activity, but is a moral category connected to her personal sexual behaviours. During the

period of observation I met him lots of time because he often came for dinner and, as Sara told me, he stayed for the night. However when I returned the following mornings at 8 o' clock, when Lara was due to start working, he was never there. Once, out of curiosity, I asked Sara why Marco left so early; the company he works for - she told me - is quite far away from the city where they live, so when he has the morning shift he has to leave at 6.30 am in order to be on time at work and she added: *you're lucky you met him, I allow him to sleep here only when he has this working schedule and in this period he has morning shifts*. I was surprised by the answer and I asked her to tell me more. She told me she doesn't like the neighbours to see him leaving her house in the morning and thus to know they sleep together even if they are not married. So they sleep together only when he leaves so early that everybody is still asleep. In Sara own words: *I care about these things, you know, I don't want people to think bad things about me, this block of flats is worst than a village and I don't want them to think I am a whore*'. Once again the category of the whore is used as a moral one through which she self-disciplines her sexuality and behaviours and she manufactures her identity for her private and emotional audience, which Marta, Marco and the neighbours are, as the one of the 'good girl'.

4.2 Performing a Professional Sexual Identity

All the facts and conversations I told about in the former paragraph were interwoven with the working activities that is, for instance, Sara was answering the phone and selling phone sex and in the meanwhile she was scolding Marta for her low-necked dress. In these cases the focus shifts from *being a whore* in ontological terms to *doing the whore* in terms of manufacturing a professional identity in order to fulfil clients' desire and fantasies. So, in this paragraph I will account for the identity work they engage in when their audience are the customers and how they able to perform their identity and sexuality as professional.

When the phone rings, even if the setting is still the same, they switch on their working identities. Both Sara and Lara answer first as the switchboard operator²⁰ and they put on the stage always the same script with a shrill voice: *Hello, who are you? How old are you? Where do you call from? With whom do you want to talk? Please hold on the line, I link you up*. Answer with whom they want to talk is the key question because it allows them to understand which kind of girl they are looking for, thus which kind of character they have to perform during the call or, if the customer is a regular one, with whom he is used to talk. After few seconds they pick up the line again and the call starts. Depending on the customer requests or desires they can perform different roles such as the young girl, the dominatrix or the housewife and each identity has its own biography, appearance, voice and finally its name. As Lara puts it:

I have four names; I am four different persons with four different voice tones. My name is Alba, my name is Ada, my name is Silvia, my name is Luna and sometimes my name is Simona when I am a transsexual. Alba is the dominatrix, Ada is the sweet one, Silvia is the younger because when I am Silvia I am 22 or 24 years old, then there's Luna, but she doesn't answer very often because I am Luna only with very young costumers, you know she's eighteen.

They also have some shared identities especially for those regular customers who look for a 'girlfriend experience'²¹. This kind of customers usually calls during all the day, so they talk every time with one of them depending on the shifts they are doing. During the period of observation an elderly man was calling twice a day, in the morning and in the evening, to talk with his girlfriend Beatrice as he does for the last 8 years²². Beatrice is a good woman, she is 40 now, she is very sweet and maternal with a very normal life. With Carlo [the customer] we talk about everything but sex, we talk about what we did during the day, what I ate and so on. I mean everything is as fake as the sex is, obviously. We just have to remember to tell each other what Beatrice did that day (Sara). In fact, this kind of collective identities are not only performed for the client, but they are continually renegotiated both in the interaction with him and with the colleagues in order to be, day by day, the girlfriend he is looking for.

However, both individual and collective working identities suddenly disappear when the call ends. They start again talking with their usual voice and doing the things they were doing before the phone rang. As Lara puts it: 'You tell them all that things, that you are a dominatrix, but they really don't know anything about you, you know, I don't do that kind of things at all in my life. When the call ends, you are you, watching television wearing pyjamas.' So phone sex work is not the transference of their private sexual relation or identity in a commercial context, but is considered one particular type of gender and sexual performance that is different from the gendered and sexual performances in other part of their lives. The space created by the phone call is a sort of situated micro geography where the enactment of the prostitute identities takes place and where 'the scripted performativity in the creation of sexual identities'²³ happens without interfering with their private identities.

Thus, when the phone rings they are able to reframe their identity and sexuality in a working context and they make them becoming resources in order to gain as much as they can and to lead the call successfully in order to make the client call once again. After the mise en scène of the switchboard operator, in fact, both of them usually ask lots of question to the client about

his private life, his desires and fantasies and about the reasons that made him call this service as well. These questions has a double aim: by one hand they make the minutes pass by, by the other they allow them *to grasp what kind of person he is and what he is looking for*. In fact, as much as the identity they will perform will fits the desires of the patron, as long he will call again and as much they will gain from this customer. In Lara understanding, for instance, two of her working identities are the best ones exactly because they fit those customer demands her private identity would never fit:

‘Ada and Alba are the best ones. Everybody wants them: Alba is strong; she is a master while Ada is sweet and willing. Everybody calls again and again since they make it happens [the orgasm]. Do you think they will call for me? I don’t think so’.

Therefore performing a manufactured identity for the customer audience is not only a strategy to divide and protect their private life from their working one, but also a business strategy in order to create a marketable professional identity that appeals, and implicitly conforms, to the demands and expectation of the male client in order to manage the working activity.

5. Conclusion

The dimension of identity in sex work is particularly intriguing because, by one hand, the process of identity work arises from being categorized as having an upsetting identity in relation to the dominant discourses around women sexuality. By the other, one the key feature of the working activity exists exactly in performing a skilled sexual identity as a professional resource.

This study has shown first how home-based phone sex workers themselves use exactly the Prostitute archetype in order to define their values and practices around sexuality in their private lives in order to create a private identity of ‘good girls’ for their emotional audience. Second it has shown how the identity work they engage in during the working activity is completely different: when the audience are the costumers the enactment of the prostitute identity is exactly what they perform in order to manage the workplace in term of business.

Despite both in the public discourse and in some feminist research²⁴ it is argued, by assuming a privileged and univocal relationship between sexuality and identity, that selling sex compromises the integrity and dignity of the *self*, this contribution shows how in this kind of sex work both identity and sexuality are never fixed, but constantly constructed and re-constructed in an ongoing and mutual shift from/toward the dominant discourses on prostitution and sexuality and in/out from the personal and working life.

Moreover, it shows how they are both emerging activities depending on the context they are performed in and the audience they are performed for, rather than ascribed and univocal attribute of the self.

Notes

¹ H Becker, *Outsiders. Studies in the Sociology of Deviance*, The free press, New York, 1963.

² G Pheterson, *The prostitution prism*, University Press, Amsterdam, 1996.

³ Ibid. p.130

⁴ K J Gergen, *The Saturated Self. Dilemmas of Identity in Contemporary Life*, Basic Books, New York, 1991.

⁵ B Davies, R Harrè 'Positioning: The Discursive Production of Selves', *Journal of the Theory of Social Behaviour*, Vol. 20, 1990 p. 43-63.

⁶ M Sarup, *Identity, Culture and the Postmodern World*, GA: University of Georgia Press, Athens, 1996, p. 25-26.

⁷ B Poggio, *Mi racconti una storia?* Carocci, Roma, 2004.

⁸ J Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Routledge, New York, 1990.

⁹ J H Gagnon, W Simon, 'Sex Talk: Public and Private', *A Review of General Semantics* Vol. 25, 1968, p. 173-191.

¹⁰ J M Irvine, 'The sociologist as a voyeur: Social Theory and Sexuality Research, 1910-1978', *Qualitative Sociology*, Vol. 26, 2003, p. 429-456.

¹¹ J Brewis, S Linstead, *Sex, work and Sexwork. Eroticizing organization*, Routledge, London, 2000.

¹² A call costs the costumer about 15 euros for a three minutes talk from a mobile phone and the same price for a six minutes talk from a normal telephone. Workers earn a fix salary that goes from 500 to 700 euros a month and an additional amount of money proportioned to the minutes of calls they did which is paid from 5 to 20 cent for minute.

¹³ Prostitution is regulated by the Law 20 of February 1958, n°75 or the so called 'Legge Merlin' from the name of the socialist deputy who enacted it. As a penal law, it allows everything it doesn't explicitly prohibit, therefore in Italy is allowed to sell sexual services, but actually it is not recognized as a proper form of work.

¹⁴ S Bell, *Reading, writing and rewriting the prostitute body*, Indiana Universtity Press, Bloomington, 1994.

¹⁵ Phone sex services are primarily addressed to male costumer both from female and male workers, however female workers, as it is in the whole sex industry, are the clear majority.

¹⁶ K M Eisenhardt, 'Building Theories from Case Study Research', *Academy of Management Review*, Vol. 14, 1989, p.78-96. R K Yin, *Case Study Research. Design and Methods*, Sage, London and New Delhi, 1994.

¹⁷ This means that if they have both the telephones busy, they receive an audio notice of the new call and they make the current customer hold on the line in order answer to the new one. One of the unwritten rules of the trade is to answer all the calls without losing any customer.

¹⁸ Sara doesn't receive any money from Marta's parents for the hours she spends with her. As Sara puts it '*I want to keep on good terms with neighbours, and finally I like her, she is nice*'.

¹⁹ During the period of observation I saw several situation like the one presented above. The majority of them concerned Marta's dress and accessories, her *dirty* way to speak as well as her relation with boys.

²⁰ The customer has listened yet to a recorded voice that informs about the price and duration of the call. When it finishes, the call is automatically diverted to their phones.

²¹ They use the expression 'girlfriend experience' to refer to those customer who do not want to have sex over the phone, but who are looking for a sort of virtual girlfriend with whom having an emotional intimacy and a sheer, however virtual, engagement. They usually call for long time, namely years.

²² Sara works for this company for 3 years, while Lara for 1. They inherited the identity of Beatrice and her patron from the girls who worked there before.

²³ P Hubbard, 'Sexing the self: geographies of engagement and encounter', *Social and Cultural Geography*, Vol. 3, 2002, p.366.

²⁴ K Barry, *The prostitution of sexuality*, New York University Press, New York and London, 1995. C MacKinnon, 'Feminism, Marxism, Method and the State: An Agenda for Theory', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, Vol. 7, 1983, p. 515-532.

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Sadomasochism: Deconstructing Sexual Identity Through Power

Flavia Monceri

Abstract

The notion of 'power' is one of the most difficult to define, especially in the field of political philosophy, in which any time we try to elaborate a model of political 'order' we cannot avoid the reference to 'power' and hence to its definition.¹ I maintain that even power is to be understood as a 'social institution', in the sense that it is a pattern of order aiming at reducing contextual complexity by selecting the most widely diffused world descriptions. In this article I address the notion of 'power' by means of investigating the case of sadomasochism (S/M), at the aim to let a (provisional) definition of power emerge from the discussion of a concrete case. I chose S/M because 'power' plays a central role in shaping the frame in which the interactions between its practitioners occur. The S/M 'scene' is a context in which all features can be negotiated, including the individuals' sexual/gender roles usually performed in everyday life. This is because what is relevant in an S/M scene is not the identity of the performers, but the acting out of a specific pattern of power relation by means of giving and taking specific practices. But this implies also that the role(s) the partners decide to assume within the negotiated and then performed scene is not necessarily the same assigned to them by their cultural and social context. It is in this sense that S/M is not the mere reproduction of the established patterns of power within one's society, but the staging of those same patterns re-interpreted at the aim of (sexual) pleasure. It is just by means of this 'appropriation' that S/M reveals itself as a means to subvert those same patterns of power.

Key Words: Sadomasochism (S/M), power, sexual/gender identity, sexual preference, political philosophy, queer theory.

1. Introduction

Among the notions investigated by political philosophers, power is undoubtedly one of the most fundamental as well as difficult to define, not least because any time we try to elaborate a model of political 'order' we cannot avoid the reference to 'power' and hence to its definition. And this seems all the more true in a situation in which political philosophers are called to elaborate their models carefully considering the fact that 'diversity matters'. Globalisation, multiculturalism, interculturality, and complexity – the most recurrent buzz words of our era – all point to the impact of diversity,

and the ‘differences’ in which it articulates, on the very understanding of a ‘political order’ in our present time. In my opinion, this is one of the main reasons why we should rethink the notion of power, moving from a criticism of its top-down conception as the ‘structure’ able to minimize the subversive effects of differences by subjugating them to the ‘legitimate violence’ of governments and laws.

However, it is not my aim here to reconstruct the conceptual history of the ‘term’ power, by means of analysing its various understandings through time, though this would surely be a worthwhile effort. I prefer to adopt a bottom-up perspective, trying to let a (provisional) definition of power emerge from the discussion of a concrete case – i.e. ‘sadomasochism’ (S/M) – in which ‘power’ plays a central role in shaping the frame in which interactions between concrete individuals occur. This is partly due to my subscribing to a radical constructivist and individualist position, according to which social and political institutions cannot be understood if not by tracing them back to the concrete individuals who participate in their emergence through their continuous interactions; and partly to the idea that (political) philosophers should take more seriously sexuality and its ‘practices’, as Queer and Transgender theories do², as one of the most basic ‘arenas’ of the human (political) activity.

Of course, the fact that I am interested more in the ‘genealogy’ of power, that is to say in the process through which it emerges, than in its ‘ontology’, that is to say in what power *is*, does not excuse me from giving at least an operational definition of ‘power’, which I understand as an ‘asymmetrical relation’ emerging from the interaction – at the most basic level – between two human individuals. In this sense, I subscribe to Michel Foucault’s position according to which power is to be understood as a ‘relation’ and not as a *structure* of repression³, though emphasizing the asymmetrical character of such relation, in order to avoid the conclusion that power, in that it presupposes ‘collaboration’ between the partners, should be conceived as equally – that is ‘democratically’ – allocated between the interactors. Moreover, I maintain that power itself is to be understood as a ‘social institution’, in the sense that it is a pattern of order aiming at reducing the complexity of the concrete interactions by selecting the most widely diffused world descriptions.

Individuals interact with each other in a shared environment, whose complexity urges them to elaborate real-time surviving strategies in the attempt to avoid conflicts. In order to achieve this goal, however, they must find the most fitting collocation in each given interactional context. From this adjustment to the concrete situation also a mutual collocation emerges which gives birth to specific power relations characterized by a variously shaped asymmetry, for instance as a basic impossibility to collocate oneself arbitrarily due to the presence of ‘other(s)’, or as the acceptance of a totally

subordinate position in order to avoid an eventual conflict one could not manage, at least not in that given situation. Before moving to the second section, I would only add that the outlined process of the emergence of a power relation relates only to its *how* and not to its *why*, in the sense that it has nothing to say about the *individual motivation* leading to accept one or the other collocation within the power relation.

2. **Playing with Power: What is Sadomasochism?**

Sadomasochism is one of the most neglected subjects in the field of scientific study of sexuality, probably due to the negative attitude with which it is still considered both in the society at large and in the academic milieu.⁴ Today, the term sadomasochism is abbreviated differently: SM and S/M (sadomasochism, with S/M as the chosen abbreviation in this paper), BDSM (Bondage and Discipline, Dominance and Submission, and Sadomasochism), D/S (Dominance/submission) and also Leather (referring to one of the most usual objects of fetishism in the community, also linked to the original S/M gay male community). Each of the above labels underlines slightly different aspects of the sadomasochistic ‘way of thinking and practicing’, but these differences seem not deep enough to erase a shared reference to sadomasochism as a general term. According to the literature, it is very difficult to give a comprehensive definition of what S/M *is*, being rather ‘easier to say what it is not’: ‘it does not entail violence and it is not nonconsensual’, although ‘that does not mean that an SM practitioner cannot commit a violent or nonconsensual act but that such acts are not part of SM’.⁵

As a consequence, S/M should be understood as a consensual act from which ‘violence’ is excluded, with violence defined as a nonconsensual exercise of power upon the body or mind of another individual. Actually, all the manuals and self-help books relating to S/M are, to my knowledge, primarily devoted to investigate the notions of ‘consent’ and ‘limit’, just in order to avoid the risk of an overlapping between an S/M interaction and an act of violence.⁶ It is worth noting, however, that violence seems not to be limited to the usual situation in which a ‘more powerful’ individual exercises his power against a ‘less powerful’ one. Actually, also the partner assuming the role of the ‘bottom’ can exercise violence against his ‘top’, and this means that violence is broadly defined, since it can have different origins and targets. But the question remains open: what kind of act should be defined as sadomasochistic, which presupposes consent at the same time excluding violence? More generally, is S/M a set of practices, a sexual preference, a sexual identity, or a lifestyle?

In my opinion it is all and none of the above. It is of course true that S/M refers to a set of practices (e.g. bondage, whipping, spanking, and so on), but an exhaustive overlapping seems impossible between S/M and such practices because they are not exclusive to ‘kinky’ (i.e. S/M) sexuality, being

well present also in 'vanilla' (i.e. non S/M) sexual behaviours. Moreover, identifying a phenomenon with the practices in which it is actualised seems too reductive, in that it leaves no room for mixed or nuanced forms that could still fit the main category. And surely S/M can be considered as a sexual preference, but also in this case it should not be forgotten that such preference can well cohabit with other preferences. Things become even more complicated if we define S/M as a sexual identity, as I hope to show later, since the notion of identity is not able to account for the performance of different sexual/gender and social roles which constitutes one of the main features of a S/M 'scene'. Finally, S/M could be surely considered as a lifestyle, and a lot of S/M practitioners would agree with that, but the fact remains that this definition would exclude all those individuals who perform S/M without integrating the practices it articulates into in a consistent lifestyle, for instance because they consider them something which should be kept separate from their 'normal' everyday life.

This is the reason why I prefer giving up to look for a single definition of what S/M *is*, focusing instead on the most fundamental feature of an S/M interaction, that is to say the aware negotiation, performance and acting out of a power relation. What S/Mers do when they 'play' is to perform in a 'scene' a specific pattern of power chosen among those already codified at the social level, at the same time reproducing and subverting it in the service of some kind of (sexual) pleasure. In this sense, I find that the usual reduction of S/M to the administering of pain from the part of 'the sadist' on the body or mind of 'the (consenting) masochist' does not grasp the core of an S/M interaction, since it can be stated that 'the exchange of power is more essential to S/M than intense sensation, punishment, or discipline'.⁷ The difference between a 'normal' sexual interaction and an S/M one is not determined by its being performed within a 'community' or by virtue of the performer's awareness to be 'kinky'. Put differently, it is possible to speak of an S/M interaction in any cases in which the 'exchange of power' becomes the main feature of a sexual interaction, of course with different degrees of awareness, and/or willingness to self-define as S/Mers from the part of the partners.

Defining S/M as a form of sexual interaction whose specificity consists in the exchange of power between partners leads to the conclusion that S/M cannot be restricted to a particular codified 'identity' or lifestyle, because, as Foucault already pointed out, the dynamic of power exchanging causes a set of 'rules of the game' emerge which can be implemented, substituted and even reversed at any moment, according to the unfolding of the interaction. As a consequence, 'this mixture of rules and openness has the effect of intensifying sexual relations by introducing a perpetual novelty, a perpetual tension and a perpetual uncertainty, which the simple consummation of the act lacks', to which the idea adds 'to make use of every

part of the body as a sexual instrument'.⁸ But in my opinion what is more important is that 'openness' does not simply, or even primarily, refer to the roles performed by each partner *within* an already negotiated S/M 'scene' – for instance by reversing one's own position from top to bottom and vice versa – but is to be thought of as much more essential to an S/M relationship.

S/M implies 'playing with power' at different levels and in various understandings. The negotiation of an S/M sexual interaction should lead to the result that the (initial) roles are carefully established – i.e. who is to be in charge (the 'top', 'sadist', 'master', and so on) and who is to be the 'receiver' or 'subject' (the 'bottom', 'masochist', 'servant', and so on) –, as well as the 'practices' to be administered and received or avoided – e.g. spanking, whipping, etc. –, and the limits to which the scene can be performed, that is to say the limit of 'consent', especially by setting a 'safeword' or a gesture which stops the scene when used by one of the partners (usually the 'bottom'). Consensual S/M differs from a non-consensual sexual act basically on the basis of this process of mutual negotiation conducted *before* the actual scene is performed, and in this sense it coincides with the process through which an S/M relationship is established. As a process, this says only something about the *how*, whereas the *what*, the content of the relationship, is not defined. In particular, this does not directly imply that the negotiated scene should 'reproduce' the pattern of power with which the partners are familiar in their 'normal' everyday life, although scenes are usually constructed as representations of power relations already established at the social level.

This is the reason why I do not agree with that part of feminist thinkers who maintain that S/M is an essentially conservative, i.e. patriarchal, misogynist, and male chauvinist, sexual preference⁹ since it chooses the traditional patterns of power circulating in our society as the frame in which to insert the sexual act, so perpetuating and justifying the power imbalance at the basis of our societies. What they forget is the already mentioned circumstance that what the S/M scene stresses is not the content of any already established power relation, but only its structure, based upon power imbalance. I find that the trouble with this kind of position is that it considers it possible to think of the asymmetry of power as something connected to a particular historically given society, whereas a real equality and symmetry could be established by replacing such society with another one. But this criticism fails to recognize that the essence of power consists just in being that feature in human relations which has to do with the mutual collocation in the shared environment, a collocation which is unavoidably asymmetrical.

The fact that only the form and not the substance of a power relationship is appropriated by SMers allows them to freely choose its content by manipulating sexual/gender and social roles, and transforming them in a tool useful to 'play' a sexual scene. To make just an example, from

which the complexity of S/M should become clear: the content of a scene can surely be the performance of an interrogation which includes 'torture'. The interrogating and the interrogated persons roles must be defined (the 'top' and the 'bottom'), the kind of allowed tortures must be clearly and carefully negotiated (the allowed 'practices'), and the limits to which this scene can be played must be openly declared, as well as a safeword or gesture must be set, in order to have the possibility to stop the scene. This is what is needed to define the sexual interaction as sadomasochistic. But nothing is yet said concerning the *individuals* negotiating and performing the scene. The interrogating person should necessarily be a heterosexual man, with a heterosexual woman as his prisoner? Of course not; the scene can be also played by two homosexual men/women, by a heterosexual/homosexual woman as the top, and a heterosexual/homosexual man as the bottom. And it could even be performed by two women playing the role of two men or conversely by two men playing the role of two women, or by a woman performing the interrogating man, and a man performing the role of a woman prisoner.

This means that the S/M scene is a place in which all features of the scene can be negotiated, including the individuals' sexual/gender roles usually performed in everyday life. In this sense, although S/M is surely a queer sexual practice,¹⁰ it is not necessary 'to be a queer' to be an S/Mer. What S/M offers in the field of sexual/gender identity, is the possibility to 'queer' it temporarily by playing a role different from or even opposite to the one performed in the rest of everyday life. This is because what is relevant in an S/M scene is not the identity of the performers, but the acting out of a specific pattern of power relation by means of giving and taking specific practices. But this implies also that the role(s) the partners decide to assume within the negotiated and then performed scene is not necessarily the same assigned to them by their cultural and social context. It is in this sense that S/M is not the mere reproduction of the established patterns of power within one's society, but the staging – the *mise-en-scène* – of those same patterns re-interpreted at the aim of (sexual) pleasure. It is just by means of this 'appropriation' that S/M reveals itself as a means to subvert the socially established patterns of power relations.

3. Conclusion

To come to a provisional conclusion, from the perspective of the individual, S/M clearly shows the fragility of the notion of 'identity', by highlighting that individuals have the ability to shape their configuration according to the interactions in which they happen to enter. The very distinction between 'sadist' and 'masochist' does not escape this circumstance, in the sense that they are two static ideal types which do not correspond to any concrete individual (not even the historical Marquis de

Sade and Leopold von Sacher-Masoch). The same can be said of the roles of 'top' and 'bottom', 'master' and 'servant', and so on, which can well change according to the situation and in the course of an individual's life. Therefore, one of the most important contribution of a philosophical approach to S/M consists in deconstructing the static notions of 'identity' and 'individual', allowing to understand both of them as provisional attempts to stop the flux of becoming by imposing on it the character of being (to echo Friedrich Nietzsche's formulation), since the 'real' individual is rather to be conceived as much more fluid and interconnected with his environment. In particular, it should not be forgotten that the same individual can and does experience different power relations according to different concrete situations: for example she can well be the 'top' in one power relation (for instance as a husband), and the 'bottom' in another (for instance as a 'son').

Also the relevance of a serious investigation of S/M in the field of political philosophy should result from what I have been saying so far. Social and political institutions usually presuppose a 'standard' or 'normal' individual whose social and political relationships are equally shaped according to 'standard' or 'normal' models. However, S/M shows that not only the 'normal' individual, but also the 'normal' social and political relationships are but 'constructions', 'fictions', if not 'illusions', which can and are continuously modified in the concrete interactions performed by the individuals. In the case of S/M this occurs at the micro-level of still marginalized interactions and practices, which can lead to a particular path to the transformation of the social and political 'system', although the power relations emerging from S/M negotiation are not (usually) deliberately intended to try and modify already given social and political relationships, because their goal is the achieving of (sexual) pleasure. S/M power relations are usually only temporarily valid (until the negotiated 'scene' stops), and in this sense their first and most important outcome consists in showing to the involved individuals the fictitious essence of power itself, when understood as a given structure instead of a relation emerging through and by interactions. However, it should not be forgotten that also more durable S/M relations do exist, for instance in the form of variously shaped 'kinky relationships',¹¹ which prove themselves able to more or less deeply transform already existing patterns of 'normal' or 'normalized' social relationships, such as the 'family'.

Notes

¹ Note to the reader: This paper employs gender-neutral pronouns. These are *sie* (he, she), *hir* (him, her), and *hirsself* (himself, herself).

² For an introduction see, among others, R J Corber and S Valocchi (eds), *Queer Studies. An Interdisciplinary Reader*, Blackwell, Malden, MA – Oxford, 2003; D E Hall, *Queer Theories*, Palgrave Macmillan, Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire-New York, 2003; N Sullivan, *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2003; R Wilchins, *Queer Theory. An Instant Primer*, Alyson Books, Los Angeles, 2004; S Stryker and S Whittle (eds), *The Transgender Studies Reader*, Routledge, New York-London, 2006; R Ekins and D King, *The Transgender phenomenon*, Sage, London, Thousand Oaks, New Dehli, 2006; D Valentine, *Imagining Transgender. An ethnography of a category*. Duke University Press, Durham and London, 2007.

³ See for instance M Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge. The History of Sexuality: I*, Penguin, London, 1998.

⁴ For an introduction to the various dimensions of sadomasochism see B. Thompson, *Sadomasochism*, Cassell, London, 1994; T S Weinberg (ed), *S&M. Studies in Dominance & Submission*, Prometheus Books, Amherst, New York, 1995; C Moser and J J Madson, *Bound to be Free. The SM Experience*, Continuum, New York and London, 1996; K MacKendrick, *Counterpleasures*, State University of New York Press, Albany, NY, 1999; P Califia, *Public Sex. The Culture of Radical Sex*, 2nd Edition, Cleis Press, San Francisco, CA, 2000; G Baldwin, *Ties That Bind. SM/Leather/Fetish Erotic Style. Issues, Commentaries and Advice*, Daedalus Publishing Company, Los Angeles, 2003; P J Kleinplatz and C Moser (eds), *Sadomasochism: Powerful Pleasures*, co-published simultaneously as *Journal of Homosexuality*, Volume 50, Numbers 2/3, Harrington Park Press, Binghamton, NY, 2006.

⁵ C Moser and P J Kleinplatz, 'Introduction: The State of Our Knowledge on SM', in *Sadomasochism: Powerful Pleasures*, co-published simultaneously as *Journal of Homosexuality*, Volume 50, Numbers 2/3, P J Kleinplatz and C Moser (eds), Harrington Park Press, Binghamton, NY, 2006, p. 3.

⁶ See, among others, J Wiseman, *SM101. A Realistic Introduction*, II edition, Greenery Press, San Francisco, CA, 1996; W A Henkin and S Holiday, *Consensual Sadomasochism. How to talk about it & How to do it safely*, II edn, Daedalus Publishing, San Francisco, CA, 2003.

⁷ P Califia, *Public Sex. The Culture of Radical Sex*, p. 175.

⁸ M Foucault, *Ethics Subjectivity and Truth. Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984*, ed. by P Rabinow, volume I, The New Press, New York, 1997, p. 152.

⁹ R R Linden, D R Pagano, D E H Russell, S Leigh Star, S. (eds), *Against Sadomasochism: A Radical Feminist Analysis*, Frog In The Well, East Palo Alto, 1982.

¹⁰ See, among others, L Hart, *Between the Body and the Flesh: Performing Sadoomasochism*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1998; P Califia, *Public Sex. The Culture of Radical Sex*; N Sullivan, *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory*, ch. 9.

¹¹ J Rinella, *Partners in Power. Living in Kinky Relationships*, Greenery Press, Oakland, CA, 2003.

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PART VI

Ethics, Plurality and Responsibility

Sexuality, Globalisation and Ethics: Some Reflections

Tom Claes

Abstract

In his pioneering work *Global Sex* (2001), Dennis Altman argues that globalisation deeply influences our understandings of and attitudes to sexuality. However, the very notion of globalisation itself sparks heated controversy. Different types of globalisation theories single out different processes and markers of globalisation and hence point to different markers of globalised sexualities, often leading to different evaluations of this emerging 'global sex.' But the ante, so it seems, is upped, for morality and ethical thought are fundamentally embedded in the ways of life they are practiced in. If globalisation has fundamentally restructured human ways of living and is deeply affecting our worldview, then we will have to think through our old and, perhaps, tired (sexual) ethics. A sexual ethics of globalisation, therefore, has to be complemented by a critical study of ethics and morality under the conditions of globalisation itself. Only then a global sexual ethics can emerge.

Key Words: Ethics, Sexuality, Globalisation

1. Introduction

The title of this paper, 'Sexuality, Globalisation and Ethics' betrays perhaps a bit of hubris, an overestimation of one's own intellectual capabilities, or, even, just plain stupidity. Probably all three are to a certain extent accurate. It is always dangerous to put three big words in the title of your talk. And how can you fit an exhaustive discussion of three big words like these in such a limited paper such as this one? The answer, of course, is simple: you cannot. Therefore: I won't even try. What I want to do is of a more limited nature. I will formulate some observations and thoughts on how different types of globalisation theories single out different markers of 'globalise sexualities.' These different theoretical 'lenses' have an impact on our evaluative stances towards what is taken to be 'globalise sexuality,' often siding with the general evaluation of the globalisation processes that are linked to the theoretical perspectives. Differences qua theoretical model and orientation are important in framing what 'globalise sex' *is*, in determining its main characteristics.

But these theoretical differences are not the only ones that are important. Pre-established moral agendas are important in this respect as well. These agendas steer not only what we take 'global sex' to be, but also

prefigure its evaluation. In this paper I will only briefly touch upon this issue and focus on the relations between the theoretical perspective and the identification and evaluation of globalise sex. A more exhaustive treatment of the relations between globalisation, sexuality and ethics should at least integrate both. But given the limited time and space I'll postpone a discussion of the way moral agendas interact with the definition and evaluation of global sex to a later occasion.

I will end this paper with some observations on what all this could mean for our ethical reflection in general, and for our ethical thinking on sexuality in particular. Or, differently put: *how might globalisation affect the way we think ethically about sex and sexuality now?*

2. Sexualities and Globalisation

The *Locus classicus* for any discussion of sexuality and globalisation is Dennis Altman's pioneering publication *Global Sex*. Published in 2001, it was probably the first book-length treatment of the way in which globalisation impacts on sexuality. Altman carved out a research agenda build around his basic argument that 'changes in our understandings of and attitudes sexuality are both affected by and reflect the larger changes of globalisation.'¹ These changes, according to Altman, reflect the wider social changes brought on by globalisation. Sexuality takes on and reflects some of the characteristics and changes resulting from globalisation. According to Altman, these changes are 'simultaneously leading to greater homogeneity and greater inequality.' He identifies capitalism as the main driving force behind all this. Global capitalism engenders a global - transnational and transcultural-consumer culture, that is being 'universalised through advertising, mass media, and the enormous flows of capital and people in the contemporary world.'²

Altman presents a rich and balanced overview and discussion of the many ways in which globalisation processes change our sexual lives and influences the social organization and meanings of sexuality, creating new opportunities and benefits, but at the same time also leading to new dangers and wrongs. Globalisation, e.g., creates new possibilities where sexual identities are concerned; it contributes to the decline of 'traditional' - and often oppressive - ways of regulating sexuality, and brings new and exciting economic opportunities often benefiting women who now have more chances of becoming economically independent. But these developments stand in harsh contrast to the obvious downsides of globalisation. We witness an upsurge of defensive traditionalism all over the globe resisting the new and often foreign ways of living and organizing our sexual lives. And poverty drives thousands of women into forced prostitution, often as victims of ruthless trafficking practices controlled by organized crime.³

Sexuality lies at the core of our lives and of modernity. This is no different and perhaps even more so in a global zing world. But globalisation itself is a highly contested phenomenon, stirring up heated debate and controversy. Often examples from the sexual domain are mobilized as illustrations of both the beneficial opportunities as well as the dangers and costs of globalisation itself. The perceived characteristics of this ‘global (ised) sex (uality)’ are important to how globalisation itself is evaluated. Altman, therefore, is right when he observes, ‘[i]ncreasingly sexuality becomes a terrain on which are fought out bitter disputes around the impact of global capital and ideas.’⁴

‘Global sex,’ then, stirs controversy. Some welcome at least some aspects of this global zing sexuality; others tend to stress the negative impact of the process of globalisation on sexuality. These diverging attitudes towards and evaluations of ‘global sex’ are related to what one takes to be the dominant characteristics and processes driving globalisation, thereby providing a lens for identifying what are taken to be the dominant characteristics or ‘markers’ of this globalise sexuality. In the next paragraph I will heuristically sketch out some of these links.

3. Globalisation Theories and Sexuality

A. Globalisation: The Phenomenon

In order to specify and evaluate the impact of globalisation on sexuality, we have to have an idea of what globalisation is about, about what are its defining characteristics, its dominant driving processes, and its foreseeable direction and possible outcomes. But this, in itself, is already a daunting task, for ‘the idea of globalisation is a source of great controversy: not just on the streets but in the academy too’ and ‘[w]ithin the academy, no singular account of globalisation has acquired the status of orthodoxy.’⁵ Colin Sparks correctly remarks that ‘[c]ommon sense has it that it is the defining characteristic of contemporary society’ and he goes on noting some of the obvious reasons for this, like the vast and rapidly growing flows of money, goods, services and people around the world, the fact that modern technology enables us to effortlessly communicate and interact with people around the globe, etc. ‘There is agreement,’ he states, ‘that globalisation means greater interconnectedness and action at a distance, but there is vigorous debate on other theoretical questions.’⁶

Defining globalisation is a tricky business. Just for the sake of sketching out some of the linkages between sexuality and globalisation, I’ll stick with Manfred Steger’s definition and take globalisation to refer to ‘a multidimensional set of social process that create, multiply, stretch, and intensify worldwide social interdependencies and exchanges while at the same time fostering in people a growing awareness of deepening connections between the local and the distant.’⁷

Steger, not claiming originality, also make a useful distinction between different dimensions of globalisation. He identifies three basic dimensions, i.e., economic, the political and cultural.

The economic dimension of globalisation has to do with the fact that the world has become one global market, dominated by transnational corporations and organized on capitalist principles. The global economic world (order), furthermore, is increasingly deregulated, orchestrated by transnational economic institutions. It also means that local economies and entrepreneurs increasingly are integrated within the global economic system.

The same processes of heightened integration are at play in the political dimension. It is assumed that - up to a certain level - the importance and power of traditional nation states has eroded. Although many doubt whether this leads to a real 'demise' of the traditional nation-state, it is probably safe to say that nation-states increasingly are functioning within a world order that limits their economic options and manoeuvre space. Global economy rules not only the world, but also national economies, thus curtailing the possible impact and power of traditional political institutions. But not all is left to the global economy. In a globalise world, all kinds of international and transnational political institutions gain influence and curtail the political and judicial options open to nation-states. Also, we witness a rising global impact of non-official international organizations. Both types of organizations and institutions, by the way, often seem to have attained a certain level of 'moral' authority that surpasses that of the more traditional national political institutions. Increasingly these institutions advocate ideas about cosmopolitanism and sometimes even of world governance, or, on a lesser scale, of world citizenship and of responsible global stewardship on an ecological and social plane.

The third dimension of globalisation, the cultural dimension, has to do with processes that impact on issues of meaning and values. The explosion in ICTechnology and the rapid global spread of mass media and access to information make themselves felt all over the world. People everywhere can, in principle at least, know what is happening everywhere else. It also means that ideas, alternative life-styles etc. become more visible to all. One of the more contentious aspects is whether this cultural globalisation leads to the emergence of a 'world culture' (whatever this would mean) and whether this is a good or a bad thing.

If this is what globalisation is about, how, then, do theories about the phenomenon relate to sexuality?

B. Globalisation: The Theories and Their Descriptive and Evaluative Lenses

The 'vigorous debates' referred to earlier and the three dimensions discussed in the previous paragraphs are important to how precisely the impact of globalisation on sexuality is portrayed and subsequently evaluated.

Sparks makes a useful distinction between ‘weak’ and ‘strong’ theories of globalisation.⁸ ‘Weak’ theories are according to Sparks a development of existing theories concerning the impact of capitalism on a global scale. These theories are continuity theories. Their main explanatory paradigm is an economic one. ‘Strong theories,’ on the other hand posit a more radical qualitative difference between the global(ising) and the pre-global(ising) world. We could label them as discontinuity theories. Without necessarily discarding the importance of the economic dimension, they tend to focus on cultural processes as the most important levers for and outcomes of globalisation.

These two (ideal-)types of theories identify different processes as the main motors of globalisation and hence will also highlight different dimensions of globalisation as the most salient one. Subsequently, they will also tend to single out different aspects as the defining characteristics of the global, or global zing, world. This, in turn, has an impact on how globalisation and its effects on sexuality - and hence also ‘global sex’ - will be evaluated.

C. Continuity Theories

Adherents to a version of the continuity theory come in two varieties, depending on the overall appreciation of the capitalist processes they identify as the main motor for globalisation. On the one hand we have those who strongly oppose the mechanisms and effects of capitalist economic globalisation. On the other hand we have the neo-liberal cheerleaders who, on the whole, applaud economic globalisation. I start with the latter.

The neo-liberal variant has a favourable attitude towards and appreciation of globalisation. Neo-liberals champion the spread and intensification of free trade and the loosening and dissipation of national (economic) barriers. They, among other things, refer to an alleged increase in democracy (political dimension) worldwide and defend the beneficent effects of the heightened access to world wide information and greater mobility as the result of the globalisation of capitalism. They welcome the emergence of layers of ‘global culture’ since this means the creation of the global consumer.

Anti-globalises, on the other hand, play up the negative effects of all this, like the growing gap between the wealthy and the poor, the devastating effects of capitalist consumption and consumerism on ecology, and the destruction of local cultures and ways of life. They will tend to portray the rise in inequality, the rise of world poverty and the creation of the ‘global poor’ and the ‘global underclass,’ forced and unforced economic migration, a cultural unification based on the reshaping of citizens worldwide as consumers (of mainly Western) goods and services orchestrated by transnational companies that cannot be controlled (if they wanted to) by

national governments and local authorities, etc. as some of the main, and mostly negative, outcomes of globalisation.

'Globalising / globalised sex' to the anti-globalises will predominantly mean the breakdown of traditional ways of (sexual) life, social bonds and cultures with its accompanying negative effects on (sexual) health and social cohesion; the creation of a global rich (er) class versus the global poor where the rich can and often do enjoy availability of wider sexual repertoires and consumerist pleasures, while the poor become the global (often migratory) proletariat - or perhaps even worse, since the global spread of HIV/AIDS in many developing countries has led many children parentless - leading to a rise in forced prostitution and trafficking. Women, to state but the obvious, are by far the worst off of all this.

Neo-liberal continuity theorists may point towards the growing distribution of wealth and to the world-wide spread of opportunities, both economically as well as politically and culturally. Instil democracy first - by economic and political pressure - and the rest will follow is their adagio. Sometimes this indeed means that the political, economical and cultural participation of women all over the world has taken a turn for the better. Campaigns for gender equality, sexual and reproductive rights - brought together by the WHO under the heading of sexual health - in many places around the globe do seem to have an effect. They can even point to international and local initiatives for countering the spread of HIV/AIDS as examples of the beneficial effects of globalisation.

D. Discontinuity Theories

Discontinuity theories will tend to focus on the (possibly) more positive effects of globalisation. Not only has the world become a global market; it also has become a smaller place. Increased possibilities of mobility and worldwide communication structures have enabled us to come into contact with and travel to places in (nearly) the whole world. There no longer is a hiding place - what happens somewhere in the world can become global news in an instant. This also means that information can be disseminated in an instance and that new and exciting alternatives to traditional ways of living become known worldwide often leading to the formation of new identities and 'experiments in living'. Discontinuity theories also appreciate the post WW-II changes in political structures and point out the (alleged) demise of the nation state, accompanied by the rise in the authority of transnational worldwide organisations and their agendas (UN, NGO's, etc.). These transnational networks, furthermore, are linked to local grass-roots movements promoting, e.g., human (and women's) rights, etc. Discontinuity theories will stress the growing global awareness of both globalisation itself and of its consequences and mobilizing possibilities - be these good or bad.

There is a further distinction possible within the discontinuity theories, depending on the stance taken towards cultural globalisation. The world has come within our view. But this 'view,' of course, is often controlled and orchestrated by powerful multimedia corporations and furnished by a consumerist paradigm. This raises questions about possible standardisation (often voiced as warnings against 'Americanisation' or 'McDonaldization') but also about the possible emergence of a 'global culture.' At the same time, cultural globalisation also refers to processes of resistance and hybridisation. An emerging 'world culture' – or what could be labelled as such – does not necessarily mean the eradication of local and non-western cultures. Indeed, it often has as a side effect the bolstering of the local cultures. We should therefore think about 'global culture' more in terms of a new global layer of communication, practices and meaning to which people from all over the globe can relate to.

Transcribed to sexuality this gives us different markers of global zing sexualities: non-heterosexual and hybrid sexual identities become a possibility and reality for many; (international) programs and projects directed at securing sexual and reproductive rights and sexual health are blooming, often serving as anchor points for even wider emancipatory agendas, etc.

What are the respective merits and demerits of the 'weak' and 'strong' theories and their take on globalisation and global sex? Needless to say, both perspectives are up to a certain point accurate. The weak and strong theories Sparks refers to are ideal types of theories. Most globalisation theories combine the economic, political and cultural dimension. Altman, e.g., although putting economic processes and effects centre stage, combines all three in his analysis.

4. The Globalisation of Sexualities: Some Examples and Disputes

The globalisation of sexuality, the emergence of 'global sex' generates some real, substantial and important moral questions. Let me briefly introduce two discussions that have gained momentum in the wake of globalisation: the first on the legitimacy and moral standing of 'commercial sex' and the second on the normalizing impact of development programs aimed at promoting sexual health.

A. Prostitution vs. Commercial Sex: Trafficking vs. Migration

Libraries can be filled by books, articles, position papers, legal documents, TV series, movies, reportages etc. on the issue of sexual trafficking. No one really denies that the forced deportation of people into sexual slavery is a very, very bad thing - except, of course those who benefit from all this. But this does not mean that the reaction towards what has been come to be labelled as 'trafficking' is as uniform. Two semantic pairs stand

in stark opposition in the whole of this discussion. On the one hand we have a discourse in which the notions of 'prostitution,' 'trafficking' and 'exploitation' take centre stage. On the other hand, a growing body of literature and studies emphasises notions like 'sex work,' 'migration' and 'agency.' The *Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children*, adopted by the UN in 2000 did not end the debate on trafficking, but rather invigorated it. Both 'camps' are engaged in heated debates, not only about the facts of the matter (how many, from where to where, modalities, etc.) but also about the terms (see, e.g., Agustin's attack on the very notion of 'trafficking' itself), about the most realistic and opportunistic ways of dealing with these issues, but also about moral aspects of prostitution versus sex work. No doubt, these discussions and often very heated debates are informed and prefigured by the pre-existing moral agendas I referred to earlier. But also the sheer magnitude and growth of the issue, and the complexity drive the discussion forward.

One could say that the issue of trafficking has challenged the western (often hypocritical) moral consensus towards prostitution, leaning towards mild acceptance and soft legal regulation. Prostitution became more or less tolerated in many western countries. But things started to change when the prostitutes started pouring in from all over the globe, and sex tourism started to show its more ugly side. Surely all this couldn't be a good thing, and surely, we should help the (mostly) women to escape their predicament? Of course, but the discussion became more complicated when research by, e.g., Agustin, Kempadoo and others showed the cultural, economical, and social complexity and the ideological backgrounds to these issues.⁹ Factual discussions about trafficking and prostitution became discussions on the moral standing of sex work, its relation to international migration, poverty, and so on. The narrow focus on the sexual aspect perhaps clouds our reaction and policies towards it. We should, so Christien Van den Anker argues, widen our perspective discussing these issues, including and taking into account wider issues of migration and trafficking for other 'industries' than the 'sex industry' as well.¹⁰

As said before, nobody will doubt the real misery associated with forced prostitution. But globalisation and its effects have shown us that in a globalised world sometimes simple moral categories and agendas won't fit the complexity of reality. 'Global sex,' in this case in the form of 'prostitution' or as 'migratory sex work' stretches many of our established moral convictions and reasoning to their limits.

B. Sexual Health

Discussion on sexual health are another example of how globalisation destabilizes moral certainties and fuels moral discussions I'll use an example from the literature on sexual health and development to

briefly illustrate this. In 2004 the WHO published a progress report on reproductive health research entitled 'Sexual Health - A New Focus for WHO.' The WHO writes, 'if they are to achieve sexual and reproductive health, people must be empowered to exercise control over their sexual and reproductive lives, and must have access to related health services.'¹¹ Recognizing the all-importance of poverty as one of the decisive hampering factors in the possibility of enjoying sexual health, the WHO also points to the need of 'comprehensive sexuality education' in order to further sexual health.

Again, nobody doubts the benefits of sexual health. But just as is the case with prostitution vs. commercial sex, there are some important ethical issues and discussions associated with this 'new focus' and the programmes devised for implementing and promoting it. In 2005, e.g., Vincanne Adams and Stacy Leigh Pigg published *Sex in Development*. The volume brings together articles discussing how local moral 'investments' in sex are shaped by 'science, medicine, technology, and planning rationalities.'¹² In their introduction, Vincanne and Adams raise questions about how development programs focussing on sexual and reproductive health attempt to create a universal 'normal' (their terminology) sexuality. The contributors to the volume all address the 'attempts made to objectify sex and sexuality in the name of health and well-being.'¹³

These are real and important issues. The balancing of on the one hand, respect for and 'preservation' of traditional non-western moral economies of sex, and on the other hand, responding to the real need and demands for sexual health in all its forms and consequences, is a hard issue to tackle. If it is the case that an 'objective' or 'medical' and surely 'western' view on sexuality gets globalise through these programs, where does this leave us regarding the respect for non-western traditions? What is the cultural pay-off of these well-meant initiatives? These are hard question, and answers to them may divide the large group that in general welcome cultural globalisation.¹⁴

5. Ethical Reflection on Sex in a Global Context

All this raises question about how to ethically reflect on and deal with these and related issues. Without any doubt, globalisation and its effects on sexuality has contributed to intensifying the scope and often depth of standing moral issues and discussions regarding sexuality. It has also perhaps generated some new and perhaps even more pressing ones. But globalisation may yet have an even more important effect on our ethical thinking, for the ante, so it seems, is upped. If morality and ethical thought are fundamentally embedded in the ways of life they are practiced in and if globalisation has fundamentally restructured human ways of living and is deeply affecting our worldview, then we will have to think through our old and, perhaps, tired

(sexual) ethics.

A sexual ethics of globalisation, therefore, has to be complemented by a critical study of ethics and morality under the conditions of globalisation itself. Only then a global sexual ethics can emerge.

In my view - but I don't have the space to elaborate on this further - many contemporary moral sexual agendas and theories with which we confront the pressing issues surrounding 'global sex' are based on local (meaning, in this case, western) and often restrictive 'concepts of sex' that get universalised. Furthermore, we often tend to overplay the importance of the sexual aspect (as we westerners recognize and identify it) which often leads to ignoring local sexualities, identities and meanings, and is often counterproductive to dealing ethically as well as socially with the issues. We need to move from a sexual ethic to a global ethic in which sexuality plays an important role but where sexuality issues are dealt with from a wider perspective than sexuality as such.

In 1974-1975 Bernard Williams published an article on what he called 'the truth in relativism.' He argued that relativism is not an option when for a group living in outlook S1, another outlook S2 becomes a 'real option' signifying among other things that for those living within S1 going over to S2 is a real, meaningful and (psychologically) sane possibility, and when going over to the other outlook does not preclude the rational comparison between the outlooks and the rational acknowledging of one's going over to the other outlook.¹⁵

'Global sex' and the moral issues associated with it make it poignantly clear that the world has become a global arena for 'sexperiments.' Cultural as well as political borders are dissipating and the upshot of all this is that a simple, or 'vulgar' as Williams it once called it, relativism is no longer an option, thus forcing us to think through not only ethical issues but also issues of how to do ethics itself.

Notes

¹D Altman, 2001, *Global Sex*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, p. 1.

²Altman, *Global Sex*, p. 1.

³D Altman, 'Sexuality and Globalization', *Sexuality Research & Social Policy*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2004, pp. 63-68.

⁴ Altman, *Global Sex*, p. 1.

⁵D Held and A. McGrew, *Globalization/Anti-Globalization*, Polity, Cambridge, 2002, p. 2.

⁶C Sparks, 'What's Wrong with Globalization?', *Global Media and Communication*, vol. 3, n. 2, 2007, pp. 133-155.

⁷ M B Steger, *Globalisation: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2003, p. 13.

⁸ Sparks, 2007.

⁹ Agustín, Laura María, *Sex at the Margins: Migration, Labour Markets and the Rescue Industry*, Zed Books, London, 2007; and Kempadoo, Kamala and Jo Doezema, *Global Sex Workers: Rights, Resistance, and Redefinition*, Routledge, New York and London, 1998.

¹⁰ Ch Van Den Anker, 'Trafficking and Women's Rights: Beyond the Sex Industry to 'Other Industries'', *Journal of Global Ethics*, vol. 2, no. 2, 2006, pp. 163-182.

¹¹ WHO, 'Sexual Health - A New Focus for WHO', *Progress in Reproductive Health Research*, no. 67, 2004, p. 2.

¹² V Adams and S L Pigg (eds), *Sex in Development: Science, Sexuality and Morality in Global Perspective* Duke University Press, Durham and London, 2005., p. 1

¹³ V Adams and S L Pigg (eds), *Sex in Development: Science, Sexuality and Morality in Global Perspective*, p. 1.

¹⁴ For a different take on these issues, see, e.g., A Cornwall, S Correa and S Jolly, *Development with a Body: Sexuality, Human Rights & Development*, ZED Books, London & New York, 2008.

¹⁵ B Williams, 'The Truth in Relativism', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, vol. 75, 1974, p. 217.

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‘Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell’: Rights, Responsibilities and the Non-Disclosure of Sexually Transmitted Infections

Allison Moore & Paul Reynolds

Abstract

Over recent years, throughout Western Europe, there have been an increasing number of criminal convictions for the sexual transmission of HIV. In the UK, the recurrent theme in all the convictions has been one of recklessness (under section 20 of the Offences Against the Persons Act 1861) on the part of persons with HIV in their failure to disclose their status to a sexual partner. In this paper, it will be argued that, not only does the criminalisation of the transmission of HIV rehearse constructions of sexuality as either active or passive and reinforce discourses that pathologies ‘unsafe’ sexualities by conflating them with promiscuity and moral bankruptcy; it also raises tensions and contradictions in the construction of rights and responsibilities in sexual decision making. It will consider the incongruity between notions of sexual desire as impulsive, spontaneous and unspoken and the expectation that a person with HIV can and should always exercise restraint, rationality and responsibility. This points to a further tension, whereby in the process of disclosing, a person with HIV is speaking the ‘unspeakable’, drawing on a limited linguistic repertoire with which to communicate and negotiate sexual desire. It will be argued that it is important to consider the context of a sexual encounter in determining rights and responsibilities. In a new sexual relationship, whilst acknowledging that we have some responsibility to our sexual partner, is a person’s overarching responsibility to themselves, to their own bodily integrity and sexual autonomy? Finally, there will be an exploration of the uniqueness of HIV and the impossibility / improbability of criminalizing the transmission of other serious STIs and will pose the question, ‘What is the difference?’

Key Words: HIV, criminalisation, sexual rights

1. Introduction

Since 2003, there have been thirteen prosecutions in England and Wales, under Section 20 of the Offences Against the Person Act (1861), for the ‘reckless’ transmission of HIV. Of these prosecutions, ten have resulted in criminal convictions¹. It is not the intention of this paper to critique the application of criminal law to the transmission of HIV, nor to consider its efficacy in the prevention of future ‘reckless’ transmissions. These arguments have been comprehensively rehearsed elsewhere². Instead, the aims of this

paper are threefold. Firstly, it will be suggested that the criminalisation of transmission of HIV should be understood simultaneously as a product of long term processes that emerged in the eighteenth century and a distinct and unique phenomenon of the late 20th / early 21st century. Secondly, it will consider the extent to which the criminalisation of HIV rehearses and reinforces dominant binary constructions of sexuality and, in particular, the construction of female passivity and male activity and the extent to which criminalisation perpetuates binary categories of 'high risk' and 'low risk'. Finally, it will explore the tensions, contradictions and incongruities inherent in the criminalisation of HIV, particularly with regards to the construction of rights and responsibilities in sexual decision-making. On the one hand, over recent years there has been a 'democratisation of HIV risk'³, whereby HIV is constituted as representing a potential risk for all sexually active people, irrespective of sexual identity and, therefore, according to current health promotion agendas, safer sex is everyone's concern. On the other hand, criminalisation of transmission locates responsibility for risk minimisation solely with the person with HIV.

It will be suggested that, irrespective of the function criminalisation is thought to serve, whether it is protection, disciplinary or punishment, its consequence is the continuation and perpetuation of hegemonic heterosexuality through the 'othering' of people with HIV. 8 of the 10 convictions in England and Wales have been predicated on the 'reckless' transmission of HIV during heterosexual sex. In these cases, the heterosexual defendants are demonised and pathologised and portrayed as beyond 'the boundaries of 'the proper''⁴, articulation of heterosexual desire. In this way, normative heterosexuality is maintained and the epistemology of HIV, which posits heterosexuality as 'low risk' is re-affirmed.

It is important to state at the outset that whilst both authors see the criminalisation of HIV as problematic for reasons not limited to those discussed in this paper, we are in agreement that there are some circumstances where transmission of HIV occurs or where there is a risk of it occurring when the use of criminal law can be justified, particularly in cases where intent to infect can be proved or there has been actual and explicit deceit about the person's HIV status. Further, this paper is not an attempt to minimise or trivialise the corporeal reality of transmission of HIV. HIV is a complex illness and the receipt of a HIV positive diagnosis is a life changing moment for many people. Instead, this paper is concerned with the ways in which criminalisation reinforces discursive constructions of HIV as disease, pathology and immorality.

2. Criminalisation of HIV Transmission as Both Continuity and Discontinuity

There is a long tradition of using legal measures to regulate 'deviant' sexuality and 'transgressive' sexual behaviours and the criminalisation of HIV transmission has to be seen, in part, as a continuation of that tradition. Legal sanctions are a legacy and continuation of the tactical polyvalence of discourses⁵, which emerged in the eighteenth and nineteenth century and sought to identify, contain and discipline all sexual transgressions through a tripartite system of moral, medical/scientific and legal/political regulation⁶. The function of law in the regulation of sexuality has been twofold. Firstly, and to a lesser extent, the law has been used with a specific intention to control the transmission of sexual infection and, secondly, it has served to maintain the boundaries between decency / indecency and legitimate / illegitimate sexualities. However, the distinction between these two functions is not always clear and disease, immorality and illegality are often conflated.

Legal attempts to both limit the transmission of sexual infection and to discipline and punish those whose sexual behaviour poses a health risk to others, date back to the late nineteenth century, most notably with the introduction of the Contagious Diseases Acts of 1864, 1866 and 1869. Underpinned by a public health agenda that was simultaneously 'committed to physical improvement and moral regulation'⁷, of the working classes, the acts were an attempt to reduce the spread of venereal disease by the regulation and containment of female prostitution⁸. Initially introduced and justified on the grounds of military efficiency and national defence, the Acts allowed medical intervention, whereby prostitutes, or women suspected of being prostitutes, could be incarcerated, forced to undergo medical examination and subjected to an enforced programme of moral disciplining, which, according to Mort (1987), represents the joint venture of medical, moral and political discourses. What is particularly significant about the Contagious Diseases Act is that, not only did they reinforce a gendered 'double standard', whereby 'men of the forces [were provided] with a clean supply of women'⁹, but they institutionalised the view that the prevention of transmission of venereal disease was the responsibility of some (women) and not others (men).

In addition to specific legislation with the explicit aim of curtailing the transmission of sexual infections, the law has also been used to regulate so-called deviant sexualities, which themselves have been constructed as dangerous, contagious and a threat to the moral order. This can be evidenced from the late 19th century and the introduction of the Labouchere Amendment to the Criminal Law Amendment Act (1885), which effectively made all male homosexual activity, whether in public or private, illegal until it was partially decriminalised under the Sexual Offences Act 1967 (SOA). What is

interesting about the SOA (1967), especially with regard to the criminalisation of HIV, is that, it severed the conflation of illegality with immorality in law. Homosexuality was still seen as immoral, but there was an acknowledgment that 'unless a deliberate attempt is made by society, acting through the agency of the law, to equate the sphere of crime with that of sin, there must remain a realm of private morality and immorality which is not the law's business'¹⁰. The criminalisation of transmission of HIV is located within this tradition of legal regulation, a continuation of a discursive culture that conflates immorality with illegality. It has been persuasively argued that people with HIV have a moral obligation to disclose their status to a prospective sexual partner, or at least take measures to prevent transmission, and therefore, by logical extension, failure to disclose or take appropriate preventative action, is immoral. However, such a position fails to acknowledge the context within which disclosures takes places. 'The emphasis is unequivocally located at the micro-level of individual responsibility ... as distinct from the macro material and socio-economic conditions within which life is lived'¹¹. The epistemology of HIV conflates disease, pathology and immorality to such an extent that the discursive representations of the virus come to constitute the sufferer; the individual becomes the virus. Further, there are many activities individuals engage that might be considered immoral but are not currently sanctioned by criminal law, nor, indeed, would we want them to be. As Matthew Weait¹², has asserted, 'What is ethically indefensible is not a sufficient condition for the imposition of criminal liability'.

Whilst criminalisation of transmission of HIV is clearly a continuation of the tradition of fusing medico-moral discourses with legal regulation, it should also be seen as a disjuncture in that process; as a distinct phenomenon of the late 20th / early 21st century distinct. Despite the fact that Section 20 of the Offences Against the Person Act 1861 can be applied to any sexually transmitted infection, it is highly unlikely that it will be used to prosecute the transmission of other serious STIs, irrespective of the risk of harm.

In 2007, there were 2680 diagnoses of primary and secondary syphilis¹³. Syphilis is a highly contagious STI, which, if left untreated can lead to cardiovascular and neurological problems. There were 18,710 new diagnoses of gonorrhoea and 121,986 new diagnoses of chlamydia in 2007¹⁴. Both gonorrhoea and chlamydia can be asymptomatic, although that is more common in women and both can lead to infertility in women. In other words, in recent years there have been significant rises in a number of highly contagious and extremely debilitating STIs, yet it is almost unimaginable that there would be a prosecution on the grounds of the 'reckless' transmission of syphilis, gonorrhoea or chlamydia.

No other sexually transmitted infection provokes such media attention or social /medical / legal regulation and since its emergence in the early 1980s, HIV has been politicised in ways in which it would be unimaginable with other STIs. Dennis Altman (1986) has suggested that there are a number of factors that contributed to its politicisation. Firstly, HIV emerged at a time when medical science had all but eradicated many of the major diseases in the West. The emergence of a new, incurable and fatal 'epidemic' challenged our faith in medicine and technology and their ability to respond quickly and effectively. Secondly, the specificity of the groups initially affected (predominantly gay men in North America, Canada and Western Europe) meant that there was already a social base upon which to mobilise politically. Finally, the fact that HIV and AIDS came to be linked with sex, they were 'diseases of passion'¹⁵, further added to its politicisation. There are other factors that are significant in shaping the distinct response to the emergence of HIV, particularly the role of the media. HIV represents the first epidemic of the new media age and the popular media played a key role in shaping public perceptions about HIV, particularly with regard to the construction of the notion of 'high-risk' groups or 'hierarchies of risk'¹⁶. Initially portrayed as 'the gay plague' or 'the gay killer bug'¹⁷, media narratives of HIV have served to pathologise or 'other' already marginalised populations (gay men, IV drug users, sex workers). To some extent, these narratives have been supplanted with new media stories of the 'AIDS Criminal', the 'HIV Beast' and the 'AIDS Assassin'¹⁸. These new media discourses are both gendered and racialised, with 'HIV-positive African men involved in HIV-related criminal cases ... 'singled out for hostile stories''¹⁹. According to the African HIV Policy Network (2005), racialised media coverage has reinforced existing prejudices towards Africans, refugees and asylum seekers (AHPN, 2005).

3. Criminalisation of HIV and the Binary Construction of Sexuality

Criminalisation of HIV transmission serves to reinforce and manage risk hierarchies.

In these hierarchies of risk the lower represents a threat to the health of the higher, and hence the lower becomes the object of measures to control contagion [...] The organisation of risk hierarchies thus involves the privileging of certain bodies and sexualities at the expense of others, the protection of some through the disciplining of others²⁰

Understood as a dichotomous model, based on categorical thinking, risk of HIV infection is understood as separate and distinct categories of 'high-risk' and 'low-risk', with certain bodies and sexualities being ascribed to each. Arguably, over the last 25 years, public health and government responses to HIV can be seen as attempts to maintain the barrier between 'high-risk' and 'low-risk' groups. Of course, this approach to public health fails to recognise that perceptions of risk have to be understood at both an individual and a social level. People are not always aware of risks they are taking and what they construct as high / low risk can be shaped by cultural and subcultural values. It is possible that those populations targeted for safer sex interventions have a different understanding of risk and may be prepared to take greater risks based on a more informed understanding of what those risks are. However, despite the absence of an understanding of risk perception, much public health promotion has continued to perpetuate categorical models of risk. Where health promotion interventions emphasise low / high risk practices, it could be argued that criminalisation reverts to and restores the notion of low / and high risk individuals. Understood in this context, criminalisation of transmission can be seen as the disciplining of those bodies and sexualities that blur this categorical model of risk. There are some features of the criminal cases in the UK that seem to support this assertion. The two groups most affected by HIV in the UK are homosexually active men and people from areas in the world where there is a high prevalence of HIV, such as sub-Saharan Africa.²¹ However, the demographic details of those people, both defendants and complainants, involved in the criminal cases do not reflect this demographic profile. According to James et al (2007), 'Only two of the 14 defendants were men who have sex with men (MSM) and less than a third of the defendants originated from sub-Saharan Africa [... In other words] people who have not been targeted with sexual health education or whose peer group has not been significantly affected by the HIV epidemic are more likely to be both complainants and defendants'.²²

This dissonance between the demographic make-up of defendants and complainants and the epidemiological profile raises a number of questions, particularly with respect to incentives and disincentives for prosecution. Why are there so few prosecutions for the 'reckless' transmission of HIV as a result of sex between men? Perhaps men who have sex with men are ascribed a 'high risk' status and, therefore, all sexual activity they engage in is constructed as 'reckless'?

'For the purpose of criminal liability it has long been accepted that a person is reckless and therefore subject to criminal sanction if the risk he/she takes is one that no reasonable person would take in the circumstances'.²³

Where both parties are thought to be reckless, who would be the complainant? Could it be that as long as transmission occurs only between members of the 'high risk' category, contagion has been contained and the preservation of the 'low risk' category is maintained? Perhaps, members of those populations deemed to be high risk have a different perception of risk, recognise the risks they take and are, therefore, less likely to make a criminal complaint?

The criminalisation of HIV highlights and reinforces other binary constructions of sexuality, particularly gendered notions of female passivity and male activity, while at the same time failing to take account of the power imbalances that may occur in heterosexual sexual encounters. In cases of reckless transmission of HIV from a male to a female partner, 'women are invariably portrayed as innocent victims of men's betrayal. They are reported to have been infected by cheating or deceitful male partners whom they had mistakenly trusted'²⁴. Such representations of the 'female victim' and the 'male perpetrator' contribute to a discourse that renders women's role in sex as one of passivity, powerlessness and submission and denies women any agency in exercising sexual decision about who she has sex with and what type of sex she has. Similarly, the construction of the 'male perpetrator' as cheating, deceitful and selfish in his pursuit of sexual pleasure reinforces notions of male sexuality as voracious and uncontrollable. However, at the same time as reinforcing gendered constructions of passivity / activity, the application of the OAPA (1861) and the notion of 'reckless' transmission appears to be gender neutral. There is no acknowledgment of the difficulties some women, both HIV positive and undiagnosed, might encounter when insisting that a condom is used or that they will only engage in 'lower-risk' sexual practices²⁵. There seems to be no recognition of the fact that, whilst women do actively engage in sexual activity and do exercise some agency, they do so on, what Sylvia Walby has called, an 'uneven playing field'²⁶.

4. Criminalisation of HIV: Tensions and Contradictions

There are other contradictions in the criminalisation discourses, including the incongruity between notions of sexual desire as impulsive, spontaneous and unspoken and the expectation that a person with HIV can and should always exercise restraint, rationality and responsibility. Of course, understanding sex as irrational and impulsive hinders public health promotion messages about safer sex and shared responsibility, yet popular representations of sex and sexuality continue to reinforce this construction.

This raises two sets of problems – first the sense in which sexuality is seen to be beyond rationality, and secondly the limits to rationality in sexual relations where the affective and emotional may play a significant part. Sexuality has largely developed as a subject explicated by medical, moral, psychological and social discourses which until the 1960's were

principally characterised as understanding deviance or mending illness. Non-heterosexual genito-centric desire was pathological and so against reason. It followed that sexual desire was assumed to have rendered individuals in a state where rationality was overwhelmed by passions, whether the raging 'id' or the deformed brain or desires for perverse practice. In this respect, it is difficult to construct a notion of rights or responsibilities where the assumption is that neither rights nor responsibilities can be exercised, and policy becomes mainly focused on prevention, punishment for transgression and deterrence. Here, the assumption of what reason dictates is narrowly and hetero-normatively constructed and closes off meaningful ethical discussion about the way that people should engage in sexual relations with each other.

At the same time, the notion that there is a rational basis for intimate interpersonal relationships is problematic, or at least problematic in the present state of sexual cultures. Emotional relationships can lead to tensions and contradictions in respect of what rights someone has or cedes to a partner, and what responsibilities they have to a partner. Sexual relationships range from long term commitments across a range of social, legal, sexual and intimate domains to short term, physically centred exchanges of passion. It is possible to posit rights and responsibilities for any intimate relationships, but the balance of different factors and the context sensitivity – in sexual cultures, bodies of public knowledge, custom, inter-personal relations – of different relationships give rise to considerable tensions. Exactly what responsibilities are owed in different forms of relationships, what rights to desire or pleasure an individual has against what responsibilities to the other, and how these rights and responsibilities change over time, are all difficult to determine outside these context-specific considerations. Elsewhere, Reynolds has explored the contradictions and tensions in the quality of consent decisions when it is assumed that consent has been given, which involves engaging with the question of rationality in sexual relations.²⁷ Sexual decisions are made in a social context and with a sense of meanings about sex and intimacy that preclude easy ascription of rights and responsibilities, or their ordering in ethical hierarchies. Instead, hierarchies are based on hetero-normative values and often imposed upon rather than about interpersonal relationships, imposed for disciplinary purposes rather than in genuinely understanding sexual relations:

Again and again, we have seen that people want to put sex in its place, both for themselves and for others. And the consequence [...] is not only that they create contradictions for themselves, but also that they create damaging hierarchies of shame and elaborate mechanisms to enforce those hierarchies.²⁸

The criminalisation of HIV transmission can be seen, not simply as a measure of punishment and/or protection, but as just one of a number of strategies aimed at controlling, or putting in its place, sexual desire and expression in modern society. A number of thinkers have written about the perceived dangers of sexuality constructed as ‘explosive’ and ‘untamed’, which results in an internalisation of shame and a need to exercise self-control over one’s sexual desires. In *Civilisation and Its Discontents* (1930), Freud wrote of the incompatibility between the pursuit of sexual pleasure and the demands of civilisation; Norbert Elias’s *The Civilising Process* emphasised ‘the inculcation of self-restraint, shame and repugnance’²⁹, with regards to sexuality; and in *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1*, Foucault argued that the limits imposed upon sexual behaviour were discursive constructions, which drew on a range of ‘techniques for achieving the subjugation of bodies’³⁰. Constructing sexuality as impulsive, explosive and something we are constantly striving to gain mastery over is not conducive to the exercise of restraint and rationality in a sexual encounter. Further, Michael Warner³¹ suggests that ‘If sex were really to be made into a rational endeavour, something that we would never have to be ashamed of, would we not find that it has lost the very power that makes us value it; the appeal that we call, in a word, sexiness’. Isn’t part of the sexiness of sex its unpredictability, the opportunity to lose control and to take risks? Perhaps, the assertion that a person with HIV has a moral duty to disclose is not premised on the expectation that they should exercise restraint and reason, nor is it an attempt to make sex into a rational endeavour. Perhaps the unspoken and implicit message is that HIV positive bodies are desexualised, that people with HIV have lost the right to sexiness. This has underpinned many HIV prevention strategies since the beginning, based on the principle of abstinence; stop people from having sex and discipline and punish those who cannot be made to stop³².

The incongruity between the construction of sexual desire as impulsive and the expectation that it is the responsibility of a person with HIV to disclose their status points to another contradiction. There is considerable evidence to suggest that disclosure of a positive HIV status is a complex process, with many people expressing fears of stigmatisation, discrimination, rejection and retaliation³³. However, less attention has been paid to the linguistic barriers to disclosure. In the process of disclosing, a person with HIV is speaking the ‘unspeakable’, drawing on a limited linguistic repertoire with which to communicate and negotiate sexual desire.

The history of sexuality is one of public invisibility. Not seen as a legitimate subject for discussion in the public sphere, sexuality has been relegated to the private. What has been discussed in public and, therefore, what has determined what is known and what is knowable about sexuality, has been articulated by ‘authorized voices [which] have been religious,

medical, medico-moral, legal, psychological, pedagogical, and certainly 'official'³⁴. In other words, official discourses of sexuality have served to reinforce and perpetuate notions of normality / abnormality and, crucially, have sought to regulate the public and private realms. Davina Cooper (1993) argues that the public sphere, based on principles of rationality, reason and civilisation, is constructed as asexual, whereas the private sphere is constructed as sexual, irrational, untamed and explosive. If that is indeed the case, we are left with a linguistic void. It is highly unlikely, under such circumstances, that an individual would be able to confidently communicate their HIV status. Indeed, the 'structural and cultural and knowledge and communication contexts to sexual discourse remains one more likely to shroud unethical behaviour than support ethical behaviour'³⁵. The failure to disclose or to take steps to minimise risk can be seen as an illustration of the limits of a sexual culture premised on medico-moral discourses of pathology, disease and shame that have sought to keep sexuality from public view.

5. Conclusion

The criminalisation of HIV illustrates that the law is 'not simply functional but productive'³⁶. That is to say, it plays a key role in reproducing and reinforcing dominant constructions of sexuality and HIV transmission. Pathologising and criminalising some individuals who transmit HIV maintains the epistemology of the epidemic. Categories of low risk and high risk are preserved and 'identity, not practice is implicated as the conduit of disease. Heterosexual transmission of HIV ... thus becomes associated with a particular kind of person, a monstrous other'³⁷. In the early days of the emergence of HIV the monstrous others were constructed as men who had sex with men, intravenous drug users, sex workers and the sexually promiscuous, people beyond the category of 'proper' and 'respectable' (hetero)sexuality. The criminalisation of HIV transmission has resulted in the production of a new monstrous other; the 'perverse heterosexual' who simultaneously serves to disengage heterosexuality from HIV and perpetuate a notion of risk that lies 'not within the category of heterosexual itself but in particular perverse heterosexualities'³⁸.

Notes

¹ National Aids Trust, 2008

² See for example, Bennett, Draper & Frith, 2000; Chalmers, 2002; Dodds et al, 2005; Dodds & Keogh, 2006; Ryan, 2007; Weait, 2001; 2004; 2005a; 2005b.

³ Persson & Newman, 2008: p.636

⁴ Persson & Newman, 2008: p.639

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- ⁵ Foucault, 1976
⁶ Mort, 1987; Weeks, 1990
⁷ Mort, 1987:p.68
⁸ see also, Walkowitz, 1980
⁹ Mort, 1987: p.71
¹⁰ Wolfenden Report, 1957, cited in Evans, 1995: p.121
¹¹ Goldson, 2001: p.41
¹² Wait, 2005b: p.768
¹³ Health Protection Agency, 2008
¹⁴ *ibid.*
¹⁵ Sontag cited in Altman, 1986: p.14
¹⁶ Waldby, 1996: p.9
¹⁷ *The Sun*, 1984, and *News of the World*, 1984, respectively cited in Altman, 1986: p.19
¹⁸ Cited in Persson & Newman, 2008: p.634
¹⁹ Persson & Newman, 2008: p.634
²⁰ Waldby, 1996: p.9
²¹ (<http://www.tht.org.uk/informationresources/factsandstatistics/uk/>).
²² (<http://www.aegis.com/conferences/bhiva/2007/P133.html>)
²³ Ryan, 2007:p.223
²⁴ Persson, & Newman, 2008: p.637
²⁵ Ryan, 2007
²⁶ Moore & Reynolds, 2004
²⁷ Reynolds 2004
²⁸ Warner, 1999: p.195
²⁹ Smith, 1999: p.80
³⁰ Foucault, 1976: p.140
³¹ 1999: p.196
³² Warner, 1999
³³ Ryan, 2007
³⁴ Weeks, 2002: p.27
³⁵ Reynolds, 2004: p.104
³⁶ Monk, 2004: p.161
³⁷ Persson & Newman, 2008: p.639
³⁸ Raimondo, 2005: p.61

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PART VII

Cultural Constructions

Something ‘New’ That’s Been Here All Along: The Afropolitan Bridal Couple in the South African Bridal Magazine

Benita de Robillard

Abstract

The re-making and assertion of the previously wounded self within multiple cultural and social fields is one of the defining features of the post-apartheid scene. While the rich aestheticisation, and eroticised display, of the body is central to emerging practices of self-stylisation that etch a legibility and produce an affective texture of embodiment that is meant to deviate from what was possible during the high apartheid moment. This rehabilitation project is marked by the affirmation of essentialist conceptions of racial and ethnic identity and is further characterised by a fierce assertion of a hyperbolised heterosexual subjectivity. The paper draws on a larger research project which explores the heterosexual politics of the post-apartheid setting by analysing emblems which stage anxieties produced by shifts in cultures of intimacy and systems of kinship.

In this paper I reflect on the contemporary South African bridal magazine’s representation of the Afropolitan bridal couple. The magazine’s visual registers bear traces of the tensions borne of the concatenation of South Africa’s apartheid history with globalised forces of change. The paradigmatic traffic between a globalised episteme of bourgeois heterosexual subjectivity, and its local styles, is facilitated by, and made visible through, the magazine’s depictions of the bridal couple. Although these texts approximate the resolution of bourgeois heterosexual subjectivity imagined within the institutional context of the globalising North American culture industry, my sense is that their lustrous and intoxicating depictions of ‘Afropolitan-ness’ belie an anxiety about polygamous sexuality. They are saturated with sumptuous images of monogamous heterosexual couples whilst overlooking the fact that polygamy is practiced in South Africa. I will speculate on the reasons why these magazines ‘forget about’ polygamy, and what it is that this sign of forgetting might ultimately return.

Key Words: Polygamy, monogamy, bridal magazines, heterosexuality, post-apartheid setting, South Africa, visual culture, gender, race, sexuality.

1. Shifting Networks of Identity, Power and Culture

It is common cause that the post apartheid conjuncture is marked by 'changing matrices of identity, power and culture.'¹ Nonetheless, recent events in contemporary life highlight that there is a great deal of political and imaginative work to be done before South Africa might reconcile with itself. Notwithstanding some attempts to ameliorate its force, the oppressive effects of a patriarchal order continue to bedevil the South African social formation. Despite enabling legislation, the rate of gender-based violence is increasing. The Commission on Gender Equality (CGE) acknowledges that while South Africa's policies and frameworks for countering gender-based violence and discrimination are 'impressive on paper, their implementation, or lack thereof, is still a grave cause for concern.'² They cite a range of harrowing statistics which indicate just how acute and wide-ranging are the problems. In my view these alarming markers of gender inequity, which disproportionately affect women within the context of heterosexual intimate relationships, lay bare why it is crucial to identify and interrogate 'what interests are served by the way we have organized and given meaning to heterosexuality'.³ To do so it is necessary to unravel the contradictions and webs of social meanings, which mark the contemporary heterocentric racial order.

2. Whiteness Under Erasure?

Whiteness' destabilisation figures prominently within the realignment of identity across intersecting vectors. Naturally, as the privileged position it held during the high apartheid moment is being eroded, whiteness is being remade. Kalpana Seshadri Crooks notes that 'whiteness should not describe a group or race' that it should rather 'be seen as a term that makes the logic of race thinking possible'.⁴ I need to emphasise that South Africans are constrained by racial imaginaries forged in the colonial and apartheid periods even as these imaginaries are shape shifting. The 'loss of racial dominance',⁵ that Foster argues, is feared in the US context, is underway in South Africa. While the extent to which this has been effected is the subject of ongoing debate, what is not in question is the fact that these changes are the source of considerable anxiety. Now of course there are many variations and nuances within these realignments that I cannot address in this paper. I will highlight one salient pattern.

In her analysis of influential novels written in the Afrikaans language in the post apartheid period, Zoë Wicomb isolates recurrent textual strategies for 'refiguring Afrikanerhood in relation to whiteness'.⁶ She argues that 'Afrikaner ethnicity is rehabilitated and its whiteness is effaced through an association with blackness'.⁷ My sense is that this textual procedure is a recurring trope within contemporary South African public life and visual cultures. It resonates with tactics Foster identifies in the performance of

whiteness in global cinema in which characters temporarily leave whiteness behind to engage in a forbidden hybridity.⁸ Within the South African context, Melissa Steyn's reading of early post apartheid cinema (e.g. *Taxi to Soweto*) reveals a similar pattern - in which the 'white' subject journeys into the township to erase traumatic histories of colonialism and apartheid whilst professing to confront and reconcile with them.⁹

In their analysis of *National Geographic* photographs Catherine Lutz and Jane Collins note that in the post war period in North America when the civil rights movement challenged 'white' privilege, the previously common place images of 'white' travellers with what they call 'dark skinned' people disappear from the magazine.¹⁰ They attribute this vanishing to widely felt collective fears about the growing cultural and political assertion of their fellow 'black' citizens. For Lutz and Collins, then, an anxiety felt within the social world shows up in *National Geographic* in the following way

By the late 1960's these images were too disturbing, the possibility of rebellion and anger too present. 'White' travellers simply disappeared from the pictures, removing the possibility of conflictual relationships. With this action third world spaces were cleared for fantasy and constituted as safe, comfortable spaces where race was not an issue - where white subjects did not have to re-evaluate the sources of their privilege.¹¹

Broadly speaking, I would argue that the 'White African' imagery/trope produced in contemporary South African media evinces a reversal of this journey. As 'white' privilege is eroded, subjects marked as 'white' become anxious and in response to this fretfulness they step into the picture's frame and are positioned with bodies, objects and aesthetics popularly thought to signal 'blackness' and 'African-ness'. I have noticed that the 'White African' trope produced in contemporary South African media evinces a reversal of this journey. As 'white' privilege is eroded, subjects marked as 'white' become anxious and in response to this fretfulness they step into the picture's frame and are positioned with bodies, objects and aesthetics popularly construed as 'black' and 'African'.

3. The 'New' Nativism

I would further propose that the aforementioned trope is entangled with a concomitant and enthusiastic revival of what Achille Mbembe calls 'nativism' and 'traditionalism' in which essentialist ideas about authentic racial and ethnic identities are asserted and displayed.¹² This expression of nativism needs to be seen in its connection with the erosion of 'white' privilege. Writing in an editorial in the *Sunday Times* newspaper Mbembe comments on this development.

It is as if South Africa is unable to face up to race at the very moment that the walls of racism, while still entrenched, are falling [...] the persistent denial of white privilege partly explains this state of things. But so does the drive to assert a form of blackness predicated on the twin ideas of nativism and victimhood. The two defensive logics of black nativism and white denialism collide and collude.¹³

There are many ways to account for this impulse towards reifying ethnic and racial identity and of course it is a response to South Africa's colonial and apartheid histories. Scholars including Nuttall, Motsemme and Posel note that the re-making and assertion of the previously wounded self within multiple cultural and social fields is one of the defining features of the post apartheid scene.¹⁴ The meticulous and rich aestheticisation, in addition to the eroticised display, of the self is central to emerging practices of self-stylisation that etch a legibility, and produce an affective texture, of embodiment that is meant to deviate from what was possible during the high apartheid moment. This process is marked by an affirmation of essentialist conceptions of racial and ethnic identity. I would add that this rehabilitation project is frequently characterised by a fierce assertion of a hyperbolised heterosexual subjectivity. I would argue that a turbulence around sexuality, together with its hyper visibility, suggests that heterosexuality is an exceptionally anxious identity 'category' in contemporary South Africa. Mason Stokes comments on this conjunction of visibility with anxiety by noting

As heterosexuality emerges as both a biological and a political requirement, it becomes, in many ways, more visible. And this visibility causes a certain anxiety, as it simultaneously produces the spectre of heterosexuality's necessary corollary, homosexuality.¹⁵

To account for the features of the South African scene it is necessary to constructively reverse the key terms of Stokes's formulation to say that this visibility is a symptom of the anxiety excited by 'growing pressures on the foundation and fabric of institutionalised heterosexuality from a variety of socially significant sites'.¹⁶ In the main, these 'growing pressures' emanate from shifting patterns of female economic empowerment and autonomy in addition to the perceived threat posed by constitutionally sanctioned same-sex marriages.

4. Something 'New' That's Been Here all Along

The wedding is a ritual highpoint within the social imaginary and forms a *mise-en-scène* within which heterosexuality is most visibly and extravagantly materialised. Bridal magazines facilitate, and depict, the wedding ritual and form part of a broader nexus of the imbricated technologies of gender and sexuality. In a sense, the bridal magazine is the fossilised performance of the wedding; while the wedding, in turn, performs heterosexuality. The magazines constitute theatres of the self in which prestige identities are asserted through configurations, and symbols, of consumption. They also demonstrate the influence of globalised discourses on romance, weddings, marriage and sexuality on contemporary South African modes of heterosexual self-stylisation. A reading of the bridal magazine's visual registers that reveal a sense of shifting identity and power relations evidence the tensions borne of the concatenation of South Africa's apartheid history with globalised forces of change. The paradigmatic traffic between a globalised episteme of bourgeois heterosexual subjectivity and its local inflections is thus facilitated by, and made visible through, the magazine's depictions of the bridal couple.

Many scholars have convincingly established that the tradition/modernity binary is an imaginary opposition rather than an actual one. As Jean-Francois Bayart demonstrates in his analysis of 'invented traditions' and 'imagined communities' on the African continent:

colonized and colonizers often acted together, sometimes within the same institutions, the same intellectual currents, and the same beliefs, but most often with differing objectives, and almost always in the mode of a working misunderstanding.¹⁷

Rather than being absolutely separate or different from 'modernity', 'tradition' was/is produced through the crucible of modernity – it is a 'modern' phenomena. Notwithstanding this detail, this rift is frequently (re)produced in South African public life and visual cultures. The bridal magazine, and many of the couples they depict, often summon this binary in fairly stark terms. This is evident in the interface between textual operations that construct 'difference' and those that seek to construct 'sameness'. These processes are bound up with complex indices of temporality: the 'historical', the contemporary and the ahistorical or 'eternal'. Consequently the brides and grooms pictured in these magazines become mystifying figures of space-time compression. There is a double articulation at work in many of the magazines' depictions of black subjects in particular. The Afropolitan couples seem to be saying: we are having both a new, and an older, wedding. And yet, the objects that are meant to signal tradition, timelessness and

authenticity are regularly invented. Hence this identity is 'rooted' in forms that never existed in the past; but which are deemed to stand in for the past – as though they were always 'there'. It is not just a question of a 'modern' subjectivity being modelled within a hybrid temporal frame because some of the artefacts that are meant to anchor identity (and metonymically stand in for 'tradition' and 'history') are themselves imaginary. As a consequence there is something remarkably illusory about some of the forms of identity the magazines (and bridal pairs) assemble in an attempt to resolve the tradition/modernity binary that the texts imagine. The real question at stake here is what is it that these practices do? This question cannot be addressed in a comprehensive way in this paper. For my purposes here I would ask if the forms of fakery and artifice some of the Afropolitan bridal couples stage are a kind of amnesia akin to the traumatic amnesia Mbembe identifies in contemporary Johannesburg's allusive architecture in which, 'the mark of the past ... is only a trace, not a literal recollection?'¹⁸ If one might suggest an affinity between these two processes, then we could ask what it is the bridal couple are forgetting, and what this sign of forgetting ultimately returns?

Although these texts approximate the resolution of bourgeois heterosexual subjectivity imagined within the institutional context of the globalised/ising American culture industry, my sense is that their lustrous and intoxicating depictions of 'Afropolitan-ness' belie an anxiety about polygamous sexuality. The magazines are saturated with sumptuous images of monogamous heterosexual couples whilst simultaneously being compelled to acknowledge that there are cultural practices that are not so easily accommodated by the bourgeois heterosexual resolution upon which the romance script is predicated. In arguing against a cultural imperialist reading of consumer magazines in South Africa, Sonja Laden claims that they, 'exemplify and contribute to a middle class urban repertoire comprising lifestyles that are both transnational or global and locally South African.'¹⁹ She further asserts, 'these magazines are instrumental in redefining and re-legitimising indigenous customs, values, and beliefs for black South Africans living in urban environments.'²⁰ She says this is evident in, 'the profusion of debates thrashing out the pros and cons of a range of questions' including the 'the traditional vs. Western, primarily Christian, marriage customs and wedding ceremonies.'²¹ In contradistinction to Laden's reading I would argue that it is difficult to discern a seamless legitimisation of customary marriage and its associated practices. In its *National Gender Opinion Survey*, the CGE notes that

iLobolo (as defined in The Recognition of Customary Marriages Act no 120 of 1998) refers to the property in cash or in kind, whether known as *lobolo*, *bogadi*, *bohali*, *xuma*, *lumalo*, *thaka*, *ikhazi*, *magadi*, *emabheka*, or by any

other name, which a prospective husband or head of his family in consideration of a customary marriage. It also marks the establishment of a relationship between the two families.²²

The report further notes that the Recognition of Customary Marriages Act 1998 – recognizes non-Eurocentric marriages that occur according to African custom where women are free to exercise rural practices but are not as minors (sic) and dependent upon their husbands for economic survival; they are entitled to acquire assets subject to the matrimonial property system.²³

Notwithstanding its efforts to acknowledge some of these practices and to explain them within the framework provided by the romance script, the magazine's insistence upon the monogamous heterosexual romantic couple betrays a nervousness with respect to lived experiences of heterosexuality within the post apartheid context. Bridal magazines go to some lengths to address certain practices, especially *ilobolo*, that they, and their readers, construe as 'traditional' or 'cultural', and do so in a spirit of wanting to legitimise these practices within the context of the discursive logic of the bourgeois heterosexual resolution. However, they repeatedly gloss over tensions within reader's narratives about reworking traditions within a contemporary context and tend to avoid the subject of polygamy altogether. The magazines therefore gesture towards contestations around the 'acceptable' forms of heterosexual practice within the South African setting. This is evident in their ambiguous attitudes towards 'traditional' marriages in which they engage with one aspect of customary marriage (*lobola*) whilst eliding questions around polygamy. Ambivalence about polygamy and *lobola* therefore shows up in the magazine albeit in a distilled manner.

In her article titled, 'Back to your Roots' Collins indicates how these texts do not only work to 'relegitimise' traditional practices; but that they also seek to reintroduce some of their urban readers to the very practices that they say anchors their identities. Collins prefaces her remarks by indicating in the subtitle that 'sometimes a couple want a wedding that honours their heritage – but that could mean first having to find out what those traditions are.'²⁴ Her report provides an account of Nobesuthu and Muzi's deliberations in planning their wedding. Nobesuthu reflects on her experience of a traditional marriage 'process' by indicating that, 'At first I didn't like the idea of *lobola*'.²⁵ She motivates her initial response by signalling a discomfort with the commodifying logic she originally took to be underpinning *the* practice: 'It felt to me like I was being sold.'²⁶ She then notes that she came to view *ilobolo* in a different light after discussing it with her father: 'I began

to understand that it's about building relationships between two families, about the fact that they are merging and becoming one family through your marriage. And that's really special.'²⁷ There are tensions woven into the fabric of the text, which are often evident in Nobesuthu's comments; but these strains are neither foregrounded nor explored. The rhetorical strategy is to gloss over potential disruptive or contradictory moments within Nobesuthu's narrative and to emphasise an harmonious resolution to the heterogeneity the text describes. For instance, there is a moment when Nobesuthu describes the *ilobolo* negotiations and exclaims that 'I had to wear a skirt and sit on the floor with my legs crossed while we went through the formalities. And then, when the price was to be decided, I had to leave the room!'²⁸ Collins might have probed Nobesuthu at this point, or at least asked her why she had become so animated when recounting this aspect of the negotiations; but she skims over the negotiations and appears to be anxious not to draw attention to any of the evident tensions in Nobesuthu's narrative. This procedure is mirrored in the pictorial elements that accompany the written aspects of the text. Notwithstanding Collins's acknowledgement that, cash, rather than cattle, is now the 'preferred currency' in *ilobolo* negotiations, the article is framed by, and saturated with, quaint illustrations of cows. These illustrations function as a synecdoche which suggests that a potentially vexing set of 'rural traditions' has been comfortably recast and distilled into a modern conception of the monogamous heterosexual romantic couple.

The magazine is caught between an obligation to acknowledge that marriages in South Africa are not always, or only, 'civil' unions and an anxiety about opening up troublesome aspects of a heterosexual politics that is infused with racial politics. In doing so it celebrates *ilobolo* without acknowledging that contemporary customary marriage processes are contested not only by feminist scholars and activists; but also by an audience it presumably intends to address. Many female subjects assert do not endorse polygamy and query the forms some contemporary *ilobolo* practices take. In her survey of women who reside in 'rural communities' across three provinces, Janet Hinson Shope established that 'the black women seek to maintain the relational facets of the *lobolo* tradition'; but, that they 'object to the ways some men appropriate the custom to maximise their interests.'²⁹ There is disquiet among many young 'black' women who worry that contemporary '*lobolo* practices encourage men to view their wives as property'.³⁰ They generally do not advocate an outright rejection of 'traditional' marriages; but rather express concerns about how this practice is increasingly held captive to the logic of capital and how this intensifies processes through which female subjects are commodified. Neither of these examples, and they are typical of the bridal magazine's rhetorical strategies in this area, acknowledge that customary marriage processes have been, and

continue to be, subjected to scrutiny. The magazines are mute about important features of different practices and styles of heterosexual identity in South Africa. When they do address the subject, bridal magazines idealise *ilobolo* practices and ignore tensions within reader's narratives about reworking 'tradition' within a contemporary context. As Lutz and Collins note, idealisations and silences within visual cultures are responses to particular cultural fears. The question to be answered, then, is why are these magazines reluctant to address these topics?

Now of course the bridal magazine is a fantasy space with a deep investment in representations of heterosexual monogamy and one might well say: 'of course this magazine is not going to talk about polygamy!' My rejoinder would be that the inclusion of highly stylised representations of one feature of customary marriage practices (*ilobolo*) alongside the exclusion of polygamy is not coincidental. Rather, it is significant. In my view this silence is an index of a widely felt cultural angst, which Neville Hoad says produces a 'representational crisis' around 'black' masculinity.³¹ Confronting this issue would mean addressing the volatile cocktail of race and sexuality. Like *National Geographic* magazine in the 1960s, the magazines avoid dealing with polygamy because they intuitively understand that doing so would entail confronting questions about race as well. So instead they distil the tensions borne of South Africa's complex heterogeneity into lavish tableau that invoke the 'rainbow nation' mythos. This strategy is repeated across the polity in other zones of representation and sites of public deliberation. Mbembe reflects on the politics of 'racial reconciliation' in South Africa and notes that 'the country is undergoing multiple and systemic transitions, at different paces and rhythms' where

The meaning of race and the nature of racial identity are far more complex and ambiguous now than ever before. The categories 'black,' 'Afrikaner,' 'white,' 'coloured,' and 'Asian' are no longer pre-fixed. The discourses through which South Africans represent race relations are changing.³²

Mbembe draws a parallel between contemporary South Africa and the United States in the immediate 'aftermath of the civil rights movement.'³³ He observes that in the United States 'In an era of legal racial equality, white racism [...] had to don new clothes' and that 'not only did racism become subtle and often unconsciously practiced but many whites even went so far as to declare that racism was a thing of the past.'³⁴ He adds that '[s]imilar developments can be observed in South Africa' and that 'while not all white South Africans think alike or share the same political and economic interests' it is nevertheless true that according to many former beneficiaries

of past racial atrocities, reconciliation means that blacks should forget about South Africa's fractured past and move on.³⁵

Bridal magazines that celebrate 'white' weddings reflect this attempt to retreat from the terrain of race. They avoid the topic of polygamy for the same reason that, during his presidency, President Thabo Mbeki adopted his notorious denialist stance with respect to HIV/AIDS. In their distinctive terms and forms both the bridal magazine and Mbeki's critique of the sexual ideology of colonial racism are responses to the representational crisis that attends 'black' masculinity. My sense is that the twin gestures of stylisation and omission, which the bridal magazine evinces stage what Hoad describes as the difficulty of representing the 'desiring male body in the times and spaces of decolonisation.'³⁶

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PART VIII

Renegotiating and Redefining

Working with Couples Who's Sex Life Isn't Working: Current Cultural Factors Diminishing Couples' Sexual Satisfaction

Tina Schermer Sellers

Abstract

In today's fast paced culture many couples find themselves caught in a time and energy scarcity that seems to be effecting not only intimacy within the partnership, but the time to understand constraints and conflicting cultural discourses. This presentation will review 3 themes associated with sexual and relational discontent which in part seems exacerbated by urban work/life demands. 300 sexual autobiographies of Marriage and Family graduate students from 1997-2007 and 100 couple therapy interviews in 2006 were reviewed for repeated themes relating to relationship and sexual understanding and satisfaction. All participants resided in the Seattle area where the high-tech industry and a high cost of living set the pace for corporate and family life. These themes will be reviewed in detail and clinical examples given. Ideas for clinical interventions will be shared and generated.

Key Words: Sexuality, sex, work life balance, dissatisfaction, stress, shame, silence, confusion

1. Introduction

In today's fast-paced, high-demand culture, many couples find themselves caught in a state of time and energy scarcity that affects not only intimacy within their partnerships, but also their ability to understand the constraints and conflicting cultural imperatives that impact them. This paper will review three themes associated with sexual and relational discontent which, in part, are exacerbated by modern urban work/life demands.

In this study, three hundred sexual autobiographies of graduate students studying Marriage and Family Therapy from 1997-2007, plus 100 couple therapy interviews conducted in 2006, were analysed for recurring themes correlated with relationship and sexual dissatisfaction. Participants resided in Seattle, Washington, U.S. where the high-tech industry and high cost of living set the pace for corporate and family life.

The first study group consisted of 300 graduate family therapy students' age range 21 – 60 years of age with the median age of 30. The gender breakdown was 23.4% male and 76.6% female, 17.6% ethnic

minority and 7.8% international. The couples study group consisted of 14 couples and 100 interviews. The age range of this group was 25 – 58 years of age with a 14% between 20–30, 36% between 31-40, 28% between 41-50, and 22% between 51-60. The socio-economic status of the couples was similar – all were professionals and all were middle to upper middle class with a median annual household income of \$100,000. In analysing the data three themes emerged: Out of Breath (exhaustion); Under your Breath (repression) and Holding your Breath (confusion).

2. Out of Breath (Exhaustion)

In this first theme, Out of Breath, couples told stories of how their communication and time together had become consumed with the logistics of running their life. They spoke of no time for connection, increased time at work, increased time with technology and increased time with social obligations. Gone was time for simply enjoying each other or enjoying the nuances of life. In a market driven culture, the cost of consuming is not examined – instead couples come into therapy wondering why they are exhausted and burned out. Why joy is elusive. Whether culture acknowledges it or not, time, finances, physical energy and emotional energy are fairly finite – and within these constraints people are left to craft a life of meaning. Career, relationships, logistics and renewal are set within these constraints.¹ But in the US, a market driven culture sells the paradox that ‘you can have all the time and satisfaction you want if you just work harder.’ This contradiction sets people up for burn-out, dissatisfaction and depression; all killers of pleasure. Here are a few brief statistics:²

- The typical, middle income married couple family works 3,885 hours – that’s an increase of 247 hours, or nearly six weeks in 10 years. Nearly 2 weeks more than any other industrialized country.
- Working couples lost an average of 22 hours a week of family and personal time between 1969 – 1999.
- 63% of Americans report sleeping less than 8 hours a night.³

When people are under constant stress from situations that lack meaning and purpose, the stress takes a toll on the mind, soul, relationships, and body. Metabolically – muscle breaks down, connective tissues breakdown, and fat is deposited in the trunk and face. Immune response is lowered. Fluid retention and blood pressure is increased. Kidney filtration rate is compromised and sodium retention is increased. Mood is increasingly unstable, depression rises, taste, hearing and smell is reduced and hunger and food intake often increase.⁴

3. Under your Breath (The Cost of Repression)

90% of the students interviewed grew up in homes where conversations of sexuality were silenced and shamed. An overwhelming number of students described knowing from an early age not to talk about sexual thoughts or curiosities. 72% described at least one normative sexual play activity as a child where they were 'caught' and 'punished'. One 32 year old student was quoted as saying, *'The word 'sex' was not spoken, nor was any remotely related topic discussed. In other words, silence about sexuality in my family meant it was shameful, scary, hurtful or controversial.'*

85% grew up in homes where there was a religious heritage. Of that 85%, 47% attended church regularly (>1x/mo). 80% reported knowing overtly or covertly that they were not supposed to have sex before marriage or in high school or 'until they were an adult'. 25% reported being involved in some kind of youth church related activity where the only time sexuality was brought up was when they were being told that abstinence and 'purity' was expected until marriage. Throughout these stories the cost of this silence was clearly described. Sex avoidant families truncate a developing youth's ability to feel comfortable with sexuality as an adult.⁵ Many people have been socialized not to even think about sex, therefore are unable to explore enough to know what kind of touch they like, let alone possess the skills to discuss this.

In addition to silence, shame has a profound effect on people's sense of themselves and thus on their ability to receive love. According to research, shame attributes to the self as a whole; specifically, an intense negative affect about the self in its entirety.⁶ Shame touches every aspect of life and most centrally intimate and personal relationships. As was evident in these autobiographies, 'Silence is an education in sexual attitudes and gender roles. Like it or not, the family is always the predominant purveyor of the child's erotic map and attitudes toward eroticism.'⁷

4. Holding your Breath (Confusion)

This particular theme emerged as a repeating pattern in both the autobiographies and the couple interviews. This pattern was in part a recursive cycle induced by the sexual silence and shame of their past colliding with the sexuality that is advertised as 'normal' in print, TV and movie media. Silence, shame and sexual ignorance seemed to lead to assumptions, comparison, and confusion. For example, these participants were clear about their desire for sexual pleasure, intimacy and to be more fully satisfied as they grow and experience life. Yet given their years of silence around their *actual* thoughts and concerns about sexuality, they had not the language, experience or audience to discuss their real life desires. They had been taught how to joke and objectify sex and sexuality, but were mute in discussing their *actual* experience or desires with their sexual

partner. Left in this silence they compared themselves to what they saw in the media and condemned themselves for how their actual experience was not represented there. Disparaging comments were frequent, 'We are not having enough sex', 'Everyone is having more sex, better sex or more fun than we are.' This would often lead to comments like, 'What is wrong with my wife or husband?', 'I don't know how to make our sex life better' or 'What is wrong with us?' This confusion was an inevitable pattern of thinking and relating born out of generations of the shame, silence and ignorance.

5. Conclusion

Examining the text of these clinical interviews and sexual autobiographies revealed current urban work/life conditions converging with historical belief systems to affect sexual satisfaction in a particular way. Understanding these factors allows individuals and clinicians to develop strategies to improve sexual satisfaction and relational connection. Some of the clinical pathways focusing on these themes centre on liberating individuals and couples to author and unfold their own story of sexual satisfaction. Some of this work focuses on –

- Identifying and distilling actual sexual hopes, desires, needs and wants.
- Deconstructing and liberating from cultural and generational messages and expectations that disparage the role of sexuality and intimacy.
- Identifying their own stories of sexual satisfaction and desire
- Discovering and practicing elements that nourish sensual and sexual pleasure, and
- Creating and protecting space to explore, touch, practice intention, attention, sexual presence and adventure.

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