SAFE SEXUAL FREEDOMS:

A NEW NARRATIVE FOR AN AGE OF RISK

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Allanah Marie Ryan

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ABSTRACT

'Safe sexual freedoms' is a theoretical and political project of some urgency and this thesis offers a perspective on how best to understand and develop that project. A common political response to the recognition of HIV risk has been to argue that sexual freedom is an inappropriate political and ethical goal. I maintain, on the contrary, that no real change in the sexual practice of individuals is possible outside a radical humanist model of sexual freedom. This perspective is pursued through two interconnected forms of critique. Firstly, I undertake an evaluation of a number of prominent theoretical constructions of sexual freedom in relation to the values which they espouse and the understanding of the self that they promote. In engaging with the meaning of sexual autonomy in the writings of Reich, Foucault, feminists, and gay and queer theorists, I defend a theorisation of the social, sexual self in terms of narrative identity and ethical authenticity. This formulation, I believe, offers a satisfactory synthesis between a previously hegemonic 'leftist' humanist project of the self and the influential postmodernist movement which came to dramatically overturn it. One of the primary consequences of the present analysis is the need to 'roll back' to an extent, the extraordinary - and deserved - place of Michel Foucault's work on issues of safe sex, liberation and human solidarity.

The second moment of the thesis is rather different, though closely linked in conception. Drawing on research material which reveals how sexually active individuals construct their notions of sexual and personal autonomy, I explore the role of narrative identity in the sexual practice of individual gay men and heterosexual women. Through an analysis of eight case studies, I examine how individuals inhabit core sexual narratives that guide HIV risk assessment and sexual practice. These two levels of analysis (critique and lived experience) taken together, provide the means for developing a theoretical and political model of safe sexual freedom.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My parents, Colleen and Kevin, my sister Denise and my brother Shaun are also richly deserving of thanks at this time because although they must have wondered, they have never betrayed any sign of doubt that one day my thesis would be finished.

I wish to dedicate this thesis to Ruairidh and Finn Battleday, who at seven and four years of age respectively, still have their sexual future ahead of them. While they already know how to love well, my hope for them is that their future will be one of safe sexual freedoms.

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SHORT TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

The task is not to determine what freedom in general is, but what the historically possible forms of liberty can be (Weeks, 1995:51).

To speak of sexuality and the body, and not also speak of AIDS, would be, well, obscene (Rich, 1987:42; quoted in Crimp, 1988:14).

The Project of the Thesis

It has become a certain kind of common sense that AIDS spells the end of sexual liberation as an appropriate political project. However, this view is by no means universal and is contested by a variety of political constituencies, including gay men, feminists and AIDS activists, who share at least the optimism of Cindy Patton when she claims that 'safer sex is sexual liberation' (Patton, 1989:244). However to write of sexual liberation in the 1990s means confronting public narratives in which HIV risk is constructed as profoundly 'limiting' the sexual sphere. These popular notions are joined by various theoretical narratives that also tell a tale of the end of the 'sexual revolution'. Particular versions of postmodernist theory and feminism have constructed their own stories about the end of 'sexual liberation' as a valid emancipatory ideal. In opposition to this, it is the argument of this thesis that sexual liberation, of some kind, is essential to the political and personal projects of sex in a post-AIDS era.

In a context in which sex is linked to death through the risk of HIV infection the category of 'safe sex' has been invented as a means by which individuals might protect themselves. However the meanings associated with safe sex are various. The popular conception is that it is a *limitation* on sexual pleasures and freedoms. It is most commonly articulated as involving partner limitation and condom use. However there are other conceptualisations of safe sex which see it as a radical project in which sexuality might be reframed in terms of the expansion of the sexual realm, the assertion of new pleasures and even 'liberation' (Patton, 1989:244). Such views entail ethical as well as political considerations and in this

respect 'safe sex as sexual liberation' can be thought of as an 'invented morality'.[1] Gay and feminist voices have dominated this creation of a new form of sexual morality responding to the challenges of diversity and risk. However even this project of safe sex as a form of sexual freedom is not unitary. Between, and within, both gay and feminist conceptualisations of safe sex there are conflicting understandings of sexual power, liberation and the acting subject.

The project of this thesis is to explore what can be understood by the notion that 'safe sex is sexual freedom'. This requires two kinds of analysis. Firstly it is necessary to examine in depth the various theoretical understandings of sexual freedom that have been developed in radical social theory. In the first four chapters I explore various conceptualisations of sexual freedom. However for any invented morality to 'take hold' and become real in the lives of individuals it must connect with the subjective experience of individuals as they assess their own risk, and negotiate sexual pleasures and relationships with intimate others. I therefore turn to examining how individuals construct sexual selves around their perceived HIV risk, and sexual practice (whether safe or not). These two parts of the thesis are clearly quite different in their focus. Theories of sexual liberation are typically abstract, utopian, critical, developed from the basis of an observer-critic. Lived experience on the other hand is concrete, practical, embodied and for the individuals involved understood from the position of subjective experience. It is my contention that understanding both aspects are necessary to developing a critical project of safe sex as a form of sexual freedom. Both levels must be brought into some meaningful articulation with each other so that the terms in which we talk about critique, and suggest alternative ways of life, can be understood within the lives of ordinary individuals. I argue that the concept of narrative is meaningful at both the level of theory and critique as well as in the lived experience of individuals for whom safe sex is a project of the self. Therefore my contention is that 'narrative' provides the conceptual sinews to make 'safe sexual freedom' meaningful at the levels of both social critique and lived experience.

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1.   Weeks (1995) coined the phrase 'invented morality' to refer to the human creation that is involved in the production of values and ethical systems.

Sexual Freedom: Values, Identity and Radical Humanism

Contemporary debates on sexual politics are now rarely couched in terms of 'sexual liberation'. The notion of liberation is typically rejected as either too 'grand' (and therefore insufficiently pluralist and contextually specific), and/or it is tainted with the modernist and disciplining 'discourses of sexuality' (that constrain more than they free). This critique notwithstanding, radical sexual politics are still motivated by a desire for some kind of sexual 'freedom' (however that is understood).[2] Today sexual freedom has come to mean many different things, e.g. freedom from male sexual oppression, freedom from homophobia, freedom from heteronormativity, freedom to express whatever sexual desire drives one, freedom to create, and to play with, sexual identities and practices, and so on. Each of these variants of sexual freedom is concerned with two interconnected levels. At one level are the ethical principles or values which suggest particular states of being, ways of living and forms of moral action that are to be desired and pursued. However these values are meaningless outside of human action and so theories of sexual freedom are also concerned with the nature of the human self, with questions of identity and difference.

Debates on the nature of sexual freedom have often been riven by fierce battles between the strongly held value positions of various protagonists. Writing in the context of the USA Steven Seidman has suggested that 'sexuality has become a battlefield where opponents rally their troops against a demonized enemy' (Seidman, 1992:7). While the severity of that battle may be more exaggerated in America than in many other parts of the globe, Seidman's general point holds true of most 'Western' societies.[3] Seidman characterises this battle as one between an ideology of romanticism opposed to an ideology of libertarianism.[4]

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2.   The field of sexual politics is also shaped by conservative sexual ideologies which reject any claim *for* sexual freedom. While they are not the focus of my work here it is clear that ideologies of freedom are at least partly dependent for their meaning on what they are rejecting.

3.   Including New Zealand where in recent times the debates over the Homosexual Law Reform Act (1986) raged between a moral right and liberal and radical advocates of law reform, and over pornography (mid to late 1980s) where the conservative/radical split was complicated by debates within the feminist community.

4.   Ann Ferguson (1989:156) has also made a similar distinction between a 'dialectic of intimacy vs a dialectic of pleasure'. True to Ferguson's socialist feminist perspective she emphasises, more than Seidman does, the origin of these dialectics in 'contemporary capitalist public patriarchal sex/affective production' (Ferguson, 1989:156). This leads to a closer focus on a 'sexual consumerism' that is at the heart of the dialectic of pleasure.

Broadly speaking the libertarian ideology involves seeing sex as an essentially good thing. It is beneficial to humans and a site of the joyous expression of life. Sexual expression benefits both *individuals* (who become happy and fulfilled) and *society* (because there is a general reduction in repression). Sex takes on different meanings in different contexts (e.g. as love, self-expression, pleasure, or procreation) and no *one* meaning is privileged (although in practice sex *as* pleasure is the privileged meaning). Finally sexual expression is legitimate where consent is present between adults. In contrast to this libertarian ideology sexual romanticism focuses on sexual danger as well as pleasure. Any benefit that is to be received from sex can only be gained through controlling sex and connecting it to relations of *intimacy* (emotional, social and/or spiritual). The privileged meaning of sex is connected to its ability to express affection and love. Sex between partners should entail a recognition of the other as a 'whole person' rather than as merely a body or a means to achieve pleasure (Seidman, 1992:5-6). This typification of the debates provides a useful heuristic device in coming to some understanding of the underlying tension that runs throughout modern sexual politics, including debates about safe sex. It is also a tension that is managed, in very different ways and with different effects, in the lives of individuals.

Theories of sexual freedom refer not only to values but also to a self that is to be 'liberated'. This self is understood in very different ways depending on how 'sexuality' and power relations are conceptually linked. In the first discussions of sexual liberation, exemplified in this thesis by the work of Wilhelm Reich, the sexual self is a creature of liberal humanist theory, individuals possess an undifferentiated core of sexual energy that is repressed by the workings of structural power relations. This humanist and universal sexual subject has been critiqued by feminist theorists who point to the gendered nature of sexual subjectivity and masculine sexual power that shapes women's sexual experiences. Similarly gay theorists have taken issue with the heterosexist bias of early theories of sexual freedom. Contemporary theories of sexual freedom have therefore turned their attention to exploring the nature of sexual identity and difference. In particular debates have centred on whether the sexual subject is best conceptualised as a unified, stable self with a coherent identity, or alternatively as a self characterised by difference, that is by multiple and constantly shifting positionings. In practice the distinctions between these two positions is less clear cut, with a variety of different permutations and connections between each.

The concern in contemporary sexual theory about the most appropriate form of sexual values and how best to understand the sexual subject can be formulated as a debate about if, or how, authenticity and autonomy ought to be connected. Where Freudo-Marxists advocated a broad notion of 'human' sexual liberation', this came to be increasingly replaced by the more specific movements for 'women's liberation' and 'gay liberation'. Both movements assumed that the subjects of their liberatory discourse possessed identities that were in some way 'authentic' and deserving of recognition. While gay liberation and women's liberation focused on different identities each sought the sexual liberation of a group of people who share a common identity. Both forms of sexual politics were involved in a search for 'authenticity' that results in a politics of recognition - they were in Jeffrey Weeks' terms 'movements of affirmation' (Weeks, 1985:185). This form of sexual politics (while still existing to some extent) has increasingly come under attack since the early 1980s as differences *within* the putatively singular and unitary categories of 'women' and 'gay' have been highlighted. These differences based on ethnicity, class and sexual style[5] were seen as being marginalised by the prevailing unitary politics of identity. In response to the recognition of the multiplication of differences between, and within, individuals there developed a fracturing of identity politics in which progressively more specific identities became the focus of politics. This political approach increasingly came to be seen as problematic as politics degenerated into a severely fragmented polity in which struggles of 'hierarchies of oppression' within the categories of women, or gay, or lesbian replaced an outwardly facing politics. A contemporary response to this problem of difference has been a new body of theory and politics united around *difference from heteronormativity*. A new queer theory and politics focuses on the irreducibility of sexual differences to any unifying category, except through opposition to heteronormativity. The twin influences of postmodernist forms of theorising and the politics of queer nationalism contribute to an approach that is pluralistic, and which rejects the search for the recognition of authentic selves in favour of a transgressive ethic.

The discussion above outlines differences on the question of the value of authenticity as an ideal in modern sexual politics. The position that will developed in this thesis is closely

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5.   By this I mean a preference for s/m, 'fetishes' of various sorts, role-playing and so on.

allied to that of Charles Taylor (1994:25) where he argues that a source of oppression in modern life occurs when identities are denied recognition or are misrecognised.[6] This lack of recognition is significant to us because the modern self is characterised by an ideal of authenticity, of being true to oneself (Taylor, 1991:15). Authenticity is therefore a moral ideal that is 'unrepudiable by moderns' (ibid:23) and moreover is worth holding on to. However there are more or less debased forms of authenticity and Taylor argues in favour of an ideal of authenticity that recognises the *dialogical* nature of our self-fashioning and that this must be 'conducted against a background of existing rules or gridwork of *moral measurement*' (ibid:14). Where authenticity is reduced to a search for self-fulfillment without regard to the demands of our ties to others or a broader 'horizon of signficance' it is self-defeating (ibid:35). The 'culture of authenticity' that Taylor defends demands the principle of fairness and the chance for everyone, equally, to develop their own ·der·'ity (ibid:50). Such a demand requires the universal recognition of difference which is not to say that difference in itself can be a ground for 'equal value' (ibid:51).

> To come together on a mutual recognition of difference - that is, of the equal value of different identities - requires that we share more than a belief in this principle; we have to share also some standards of value on which the identities concerned check out as equal. There must be some substantive agreement on value or else the formal principle of equality will be a sham. [...] Recognizing difference, like self-choosing, requires a horizon of significance, in this case a shared one (ibid:52).

This reconnection of identity to values and call for a shared horizon of significance has been addressed in recent debates about the legacy of humanism and in an advocacy for a new 'radical humanism'. It has been argued that all social theorists are the inheritors (for good or ill) of humanism. Even where humanism is thoroughly rejected (by anti-humanists of whatever hue - Marxist, feminist or postmodernist) it still provides a background for *all* contemporary theory.[7] Humanism's legacy for contemporary social theory is the tension, or dilemma, between 'two seemingly antagonistic, but actually interconnected, value commitments. One of them is an allegiance to humankind as the only binding integration, the

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6. Indeed it can be argued that feminist and gay theory is at least partly concerned with claiming, legitimating and valuing identities that are commonly suppressed or devalued by mainstream culture, and that even queer theory which seeks to reject notions of authenticity relies for the force of its argument on just such a recognition.

7. Pauline Johnson (1994) explains this by arguing that where feminists or postmodernists critique humanism as being a universalistic doctrine that ignores difference, these arguments rely for their very force on the ideals of humanism itself.

other is the commitment to the uniqueness of the human personality' (Johnson, 1994:viii-ix). This dynamic, and seemingly bifurcated, concept of the person has been interpreted in many different ways in various theoretical traditions (hence the debates between liberals and communitarians, liberals and feminists, feminists and postmodernists, postmodernists and the whole modernist canon, and so on). In Bernstein's terms modernity has bequeathed both a *strong tension between*, and the *mutual dependence of,* a kind of Kantian *Moralitat* (with its emphasis on individual autonomy and individual rights) and *Sittlechkeit* (with its focus on solidarity and communal bonds) (Bernstein, 1991:10). From this perspective sexual freedom requires an understanding of authenticity and autonomy in which diversity flourishes alongside a recognition of the interdependent nature of human action and identity.

Thesis Outline

The thesis falls into two main parts. Chapters One, Two, Three and Four are organised at the level of theory and critique. They are concerned to interrogate theories of sexual freedom and to explore at an analytical level strengths and weaknesses in their conceptualisation of sexual values and identities. Chapters Five, Six and Seven are focussed on the level of lived experience. They are concerned with analysing interviews that I conducted with young sexually active gay men and heterosexual women. The purpose of this analysis is to demonstrate that the individual experience of risky and safe sex, and of 'sexual autonomy' is best understood through bringing narrativity to the concepts of identity and social action.

Chapter One provides the theoretical and political context for this thesis. It argues that safe sex and sexual freedom are not necessarily mutually exclusive. While some forms of postmodernist theory, particularly that informed by Foucault, see in the AIDS crisis a further blow to modernist notions of sexual liberation, I argue that a form of sexual freedom based on emancipatory politics and an ethics of authenticity provides a powerful 'moral source' for safe sex politics. Indeed safe sex *as a project of sexual freedom* has been an important component of gay and feminist safe sex politics. I briefly explore the debates that structure these gay and feminist safe sex politics.

In Chapter Two I compare Reich's arguments in favour of sexual liberation with Foucault's opposition to liberation as a model of sexual freedom. The purpose of the chapter is to highlight a key set of debates about both the sexual self and the ethics of sexual freedom. Reich and Foucault are chosen because they are emblematic of two radically opposed views of sexual freedom. For Reich sexual freedom should be conceptualised as a 'liberatory' project, whereas Foucault saw in liberation only the further disciplining of sexual bodies. In this chapter I develop alternative models for understanding the sexual self and ethical considerations of freedom.

Chapter Three explores the debates amongst feminists over the value of sexual freedom as a goal for women's liberation. At the centre of these debates is a concern with identifying the nature of women's 'authentic' sexuality. Three perspectives on the question of women's sexual freedom are evaluated in terms of their conceptualisations of sexuality, the sexual subject, politics and ethical considerations.

Chapter Four turns to recent debates that have fallen under the rubric of 'queer theory'. In this chapter I take David Halperin's book *Saint Foucault* as an exemplar of Foucauldian-inspired queer theory. I examine in detail Halperin's argument, situated in relation to broader queer debates, and suggest that such an approach to the questions of sexual power, identity and ethics is highly problematic.

Chapter Five acts as a pivot between the conceptually driven concerns with sexual freedom in the first four chapters and the following two chapters examining the interview data. In this chapter I advocate a form of research based around narrative theory. My argument is that safe sex as a form of social action is best understood through a recognition of the narrative nature of identity. This chapter also outlines aspects of my interview research and how I conducted an analysis of interview transcripts.

In chapters Six and Seven I present case study material of four gay men (Chapter Six) and four heterosexual women (Chapter Seven) to demonstrate how 'core sexual narratives' shape the sexual practice and experience of autonomy in the lives of these young people. I also use these narrative accounts to reflect back on the debates raised in Chapter One about

gay and feminist safe sex projects.

In the conclusion to the thesis I draw together the two analytical levels of social critique and explication of lived experience to make an argument in favour of 'safe sexual freedoms' as a new project of sexual liberation in an age of AIDS.

CHAPTER ONE

AIDS, SAFE SEX AND SEXUAL LIBERATION:
CRISIS AND CRITIQUE

In an age when more than 100 New Zealand citizens die from AIDS every year, one might well ask whether gurus of the sexual revolution have been telling us the whole truth.[1]

FUCK SAFE
DANCE PROUD
MAKE REVOLUTION[2]

The AIDS epidemic has produced a number of different meanings and understandings about sexual freedom, life and death. Both the sentiments expressed above are to be found circulating as new 'truths' that confront us in the age of AIDS. Both are 'invented' and they are mutually exclusive. In this chapter I will explore how each view of AIDS and safe sex has been constructed and suggest that a version of Patton's (1989:244) claim that 'safer sex is sexual liberation' is defensible as a political project. In the first section I examine whether or not AIDS spells the end of 'sexual freedom'. The popular media and moral right have contributed to the notion that the existence of HIV necessarily leads to a 'recessionary erotic economy' (Singer, 1993:116) in which an expansiveness in the sexual realm is replaced by new limitations. This popular critique of sexual liberation is joined by some postmodern critics who argue that sexual liberation is a modernist project that must be rejected in favour of other models of sexual freedom. This view is contested by others who, rather than seeing 'sexual liberation' as a hindrance to radical sexual politics, argue that it can be a powerful moral source for such politics. A sexual politics combining emancipatory

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1.   Helen Belding (1997).

2.   Graffito, women's toilets, Sociology Department, Massey University.

politics and an ethics of authenticity is suggested as a model of 'post-AIDS sexual freedom'. Patton's claim that safe sex is sexual freedom, encapsulates a view first articulated by gay men that safe sex does not have to be seen as a limitation on sexual pleasures and relationships. Indeed, safe sex has been conceptualised as a project of sexual freedom by many AIDS critics, activists and educators. This safe sex project however takes a variety of forms and there are vigorous debates about what might be meant by safe sexual freedom. Both gay and feminist commentators have entered the discussions and in the second section I explore the contours of these debates.

AIDS Crisis, AIDS Critique: Is this the End of Sexual Freedom?

> I see in the AIDS crisis a redefiner of the social, a whirlwind which devours, but also a storm which illuminates and reshapes (Weeks, 1995:13).

It has become commonplace to talk about AIDS as a 'crisis'. This crisis has its share of social critics - in the popular media, on the moral right, in gay magazines, and in a broadly defined 'AIDS cultural critique'.[3] I share many of the theoretical and political sympathies of this latter group, and my dissertation draws on aspects of their work for its inspiration and theoretical rationale. In this section I am interested in exploring how both popular and critical commentary on AIDS has constructed a particular story which defines it as a *crisis* for the project of 'sexual liberation'. But just what is meant with this discursive framing of the vast array of AIDS 'facts and figures'? Seyla Benhabib helpfully highlights the significance of the etymological root of the word 'crisis'. In Greek both crisis and critique have their roots in the word: 'κρίσις which means dividing, choosing, judging, and deciding. *Krisis* refers to dissent and controversy, but also to a decision that is reached and to a *judgement* that is passed' (Benhabib, 1986:19 - my emphasis). Crisis and critique are therefore deeply interconnected. Through the process of labelling something a crisis a decision or judgement is made about what is wrong. The terms through which this crisis is described indicate the moral and political values embedded in an ensuing critique.

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3.   Here I am including the work of commentators such as Crimp (1988), Weeks (1995), Watney (1987, 1989, 1990a, b), Patton (1985, 1989, 1990a,b, 1994, 1996,) Singer (1993), Sontag (1988), Lupton (1994) and Altman (1986) among others. This literature includes gay and feminist commentary, and analysis of the textual production of AIDS, as well as sociological studies of sexual practice in the context of HIV risk.

While AIDS has typically been constructed as a crisis for the project of sexual freedom there are different forms of this critique. Firstly, I examine the popular media view of AIDS as a plague.   I then turn to postmodern critiques of emancipatory sexual politics, where I focus on contrasting those approaches framed within a broadly Foucauldian perspective with an alternative approach developed through critical social theory.

Of Plagues and Sexual Revolutions

'AIDS' first entered history in 1982 at a medical conference in Washington. It was accepted as a reasonable acronym to describe the collection of diseases, of unknown origin, that were increasingly being reported to the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta (Treichler, 1987; Grover, 1988). The medical profession had first noted in 1979 that gay men in New York, Los Angeles and San Francisco were presenting to doctors with illnesses that were quite unusual in young people. In these early days of the epidemic, before HIV had been identified as the biological agent responsible for weakening the human immune system, the illness and deaths of gay men came to be called 'WOGS: Wrath of God Syndrome' (Treichler, 1987:276). From the very earliest days, then, the AIDS crisis has been discursively constructed as a *limitation* on 'sexual freedom'.

This construction of AIDS as a crisis for the 'sexual revolution' can be found in the popular media - in newspapers, popular music, magazines, television and film.[4] For example in her song 'Can't Love You Tonight', black American Gwen Guthrie powerfully encapsulates the popular belief that AIDS has somehow brought an end to sexual freedom - '*love is no longer free*'. The imperatives of the body, of love, and of passion, must give way to the rational self - '*we've got to use our heads*'. The authoritative voice of '*the Surgeon General*' speaks the truth of sex in a post-AIDS era where constraint, restraint, and limitation are to reign in a new sexual and moral order. This familiar story about AIDS as a crisis for sexual freedom is a particular form of discourse which can be characterised as 'public narrative'. As such it shares with all public narratives 'drama, plot, explanation, and selective criteria' (Somers, 1994:619). Narratives can be distinguished from discourse in that they are '*constellations of relationships* (connected parts) embedded in *time and space*,

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4.   See for example the analyses of Treichler (1987), Watney (1987), Lichtenstein (1995), and Lupton (1994).

constituted by *causal emplotment*' (Somers and Gibson, 1994:59 - original emphasis). The process of emplotment turns the many and varied events of the 'AIDS story' into something bearing a thematic unity. Events and aspects of the pattern of HIV infection have been discursively connected in a particular way to create 'a mainstream plot' that includes the themes of 'plague' and 'the end of sexual freedom'.

In the early years, media reports represented AIDS as 'gay plague' (Lupton, 1994:48; Weeks, 1989a:4; Wellings, 1988:84). The use of 'plague' as a metaphor constitutes the AIDS epidemic as embodying 'collective calamity, evil, scourge' (Sontag, 1988:44). A plague is an epidemic that is not just suffered but *inflicted*. Like the bubonic plague, AIDS has come to be understood as visited upon a community that has sinned.

> In contrast to cancer, understood in a modern way as a disease incurred by (and revealing of individuals), AIDS is understood in a premodern way, as a disease incurred by people both as individuals and as members of a "risk group" - that neutral sounding, bureaucratic category which also revives that archaic idea of a tainted community that illness has judged (Sontag, 1988:46).

In the following quotation Linda Singer identifies well the ways in which the AIDS crisis - understood as a plague - is profoundly disruptive. In this view AIDS has irrevocably changed the way in which sexuality is to be understood and lived.

> Plagues are never just medico-bureaucratic problematics. They are also world-transforming moments of ontological crisis which permeate the entire logic and fabric of a community's existence by calling it into question in a fundamental way, i.e. within the currency of life and death. A plague, according to Camus, always marks a radically anxious point of rupture in the economy of the everyday and its system of stabilized and sedimented significations. Faced with a plague, one can no longer go about business as usual. *One is forced to call one's habits, values, and pleasures into question*, precisely because the world in which they had a place is in the process of slipping away (Singer, 1993:31 - my emphasis).

Defining the AIDS crisis as a sexual *plague* inevitably leads to the conclusion that the explanation for HIV infection is to be found in the 'looseness' and immorality associated with ideas of sexual freedom. Those on the moral right have used AIDS to bolster their campaigns against any form of perceived sexual permissiveness. AIDS proved to them that the sexual revolution had shown itself to be a health disaster as well as being morally corrupt. Therefore permissiveness is not only wrong but a 'killer' (Weeks, 1988:13; Belding, 1997). AIDS is 'God's judgement on a society that does not live by his rules'

(Jerry Falwell quoted in Sontag, 1988:61). Homosexuals may be particularly targeted because of their practices, but the whole of society is held culpable because of its liberal tolerance of such 'lifestyles' and the promotion of a 'permissive' attitude to sexuality in general.[5]

At the same time that the moral right's campaigns focused on the sinful nature of sexual promiscuity and permissiveness, the more liberal media was also painting a picture of a post-AIDS world, as one that was also firmly *post*-sexual revolution. Drawing on the various state-sponsored AIDS prevention campaigns and other popular currents, the popular media has typically represented AIDS as a material limit to sexual freedom. During the most active period of AIDS reporting in Australia around the 'Grim Reaper' campaign[6] in 1987, Lupton argues that the print media constructed a version of AIDS in which the following three themes can be identified:

(i)   apocalyptic imagery predominates, e.g.:

> 'AIDS: A TIME BOMB JUST WAITING TO BLOW LIVES TO BITS

> *Hobart Mercury*, 10 April 1987

> AIDS: HORROR TOLL'S SOARING, AND IT'S THE NEW BLACK DEATH FOR THE 21st CENTURY

> *Sunday Times*, 8 February 1987'

> (Lupton, 1994:64)

(ii)   there is an appeal to a mythical golden age of sexual freedom pre-AIDS, e.g.:

> 'THE MORALITY OF AIDS
> ... Already the AIDS threat has prompted a real backlash to the free and easy sexual mores of the sixties and seventies. It is now time to recognize that every sexually active person has a duty to minimize the risk of the disease...If it succeeds, the sexual clock will be turned back 20 years to before the promiscuous society and free love. The sad fact is, free love these days could be the kiss of death. Old-fashioned fidelity, with or without marriage, or no sex at all, is once again the way to stay out of trouble.   *Advertiser*, 26 March 1987' (Lupton, 1994:71).

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5.   The moral right is notoriously blind to the heterosexual nature of the AIDS epidemic in Africa.

6.   This campaign portrayed a grim reaper, 'a horrifyingly skeletal and skull-headed figure swathed in a black hood carrying a scythe and (incongruously) a bowling ball. Instead of ten-pins, a collection of stereotypes representing the diversity of "ordinary" Australians were knocked down (killed) by the huge bowling ball aimed by the figure of Death' (Lupton, 1994:52).

(iii)   romance is ushered in as a means of salvation, e.g.:

'IT'S MUCH NICER SAYING NO: ROMANCE IS BACK IN FASHION ... NOW YOU LOVE TO
BE WOOED

Sun, 1 July 1986' (Lupton, 1994:69)

'BACK TO OLD VALUES

Daily Sun, 7 April 1987 [with photo of smiling bridal couple]' (Lupton, 1994:70)

The Australian Grim Reaper campaign shared with its British counterpart - 'Don't Die of Ignorance'[7] an attempt to shock and mobilise fear in the population. While the New Zealand state has never produced material along these lines the popular media has made similar statements about the dire consequences of the sexual revolution.[8]

While 'sexual freedom' writ large has been targeted as a dangerous political goal it has been the *bodies* of gay men that have been particularly identified as harbouring the pestilence of AIDS. Together popular and medical discourse have helped to construct understandings of AIDS as an attack on gay liberation. It could be argued that the thin layer of acceptance of sexual difference that was one legacy of the permissive moment[9], has been ruptured in the light of the AIDS crisis. 'The connection of gay men and AIDS resulted in a slippage between the idea that gay men caused "the plague" to the idea that homosexuality was itself a plague' (Lupton, 1994:123). There is a sense in which AIDS and homosexuality have come to be equated (e.g. in the graffito '*GAY = Got AIDS Yet?*'[10]) which has contributed to a remedicalisation of homosexuality. 'Homosexuality' as a category was originally constructed out of a discourse in which sexual activity between men was understood as a

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7.   In this campaign 'forbidding images of massive tombstones carved with the word "AIDS", volcanoes and icebergs [were used] to convey the idea that AIDS was a hidden threat to everyone' (Lupton, 1994:52).

8.   There is no comparable study to that of Lupton's in New Zealand. However my own collection of press clippings reflects this view, and is illustrated through the quotation with which I opened this chapter.

9.   Jeffrey Weeks, writing on this matter, suggests that 'terms like the "sexual revolution" and "permissiveness" have been jumbled together as loose descriptions of the changes that have occurred - but their meaning is opaque' (Weeks, 1985:17).

10.   Incidentally this piece of graffiti is my first memory of 'AIDS knowledge' - it was scrawled on a fence near where I lived as a young university student.

medical problem. Medical discourse has been very powerful in defining the sexual realm; 'setting the parameters for what can and cannot be said, for who can speak and who is spoken to. This is crucial to the hierarchy of power around sex' (Mort, 1987:217). With the advent of AIDS, sexual behaviour between men has once again been medicalised and AIDS has come to be seen 'as a disease of diseased people' (Weeks, 1989a:15).

The attack on the premises of gay liberation is not confined to moral and liberal conservatives, it is a narrative that is also present amongst gay men (Altman, 1986:168; Seidman, 1992:163-167). There have been calls for a 'new morality' and rejection of previously-practised promiscuous ways. In a sense this involves what Watney has called a 'de-sexualisation of gay culture and experience' (Watney, 1987:18). The editorial of an American gay sex magazine cautions gay men:

> "Discretion is an asset. Let's face the facts. It's no longer cool to be gay. Not any more. The days of the screaming queen are in the past, or should be... Why wave the fag-flag in their faces when you no longer hold the winning hand? It's time to be discreet ... Just quit being such a flighty dick-pig, bath house queen, indiscreet butt-chaser and uncontrollable whore" (quoted in Watney, 1987:19).

In New Zealand a gay man comments - 'The days of sexual freedom are gone, no matter how much we think we can prolong them with safe sex. That will result in a better attitude towards relationships. More caring' (quoted in Westaway, 1987:9). For some gay men AIDS has been seen as a failure of a way of life. The identification of permissiveness as leading to a sexual killing fields has contributed to seeing the crisis of AIDS as a moral drama and to signify 'the beginning of a period of renewal and rebirth of gay life' (Seidman, 1992:164).

What is clear about this narrative of AIDS as dealing the death knell to sexual freedom is that it has become the symbolic bearer of a great number of underlying tensions and anxieties around sexual diversity (Weeks, 1989a; Singer, 1993; Patton, 1990a). Moreover it has come to represent a touchstone for our concepts of right and wrong - it has become 'a battleground for defining the sort of culture we are, and want to become' (Weeks, 1990a:137). The politics of AIDS therefore unavoidably brings us into the realm of values. And because we live in a pluralist world the realm of values is riven by disagreement and conflict. 'Debates over values are particularly fraught and delicate; they are not simply

speculations about the world and our place in it; they touch on fundamental, and deeply felt, issues about *who we are and what we want to be and become'* (Weeks, 1990b:89 - my emphasis).   The crisis of AIDS understood as the end of sexual freedom therefore foregrounds issues of identity (who we are and want to be sexually) and of ethics (what is to count as 'good' and worthwhile sexual relations). This 'crisis' situation is a matter of considerable debate. As indicated above the existence of HIV has been taken by some as a sign that the projects of sexual and gay liberation were misguided and dangerous. Conservative social critique takes the form of a rejection of 'sexual freedom' in favour of more traditional familial sexual values asserting the safety and moral righteousness of heterosexual, monogamous sexuality.

The conservative critique outlined above has not gone unchallenged. There is a rich and diverse literature embedded in gay politics, feminism, the working of AIDS organisations and academic writing which rejects the end of sexual freedom narrative. However, these alternative perspectives, which very broadly might be characterised as seeing value in some kind of 'free' expression of sexuality, vary greatly in their views about what shape this freedom should take. In the following two sections I compare two views of 'sexual liberation' as a source of radical sexual politics. In the first, broadly postmodern and Foucauldian in inspiration, sexual liberation is seen as a limiting modernist concept. This view, however, is contested by those like Connell (1993, 1995a) who argue that an emancipatory sexual politic is essential to secure the freedoms that are desired.

Postmodern AIDS: Sexual Liberation as a Hindrance to Radical Sexual Politics

Perhaps we can look to postmodernism and a world with no meta-narratives to solve the contest between rival claims to authority, as one way of looking more deeply at AIDS and the social responses to AIDS (Small, 1993:1)

Many 'AIDS critics' have seen in postmodernism,[11] particularly Foucault's genealogical method a useful set of theoretical tools for producing radical critique. Simon Watney

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11.   There is now a vast literature on 'postmodernism' as a form of theorising as well as a condition of
         societies. Here I use postmodernism as a shorthand for referring to those theoretical approaches that
         privilege difference and plurality. I do not intend to review all this literature but will touch on those
         aspects of the debates that are most relevant to my research question.

(1989:64) suggests that new developments in 'cultural theory' with their emphases on signification, difference, the unconscious, power and narrative are useful in understanding how AIDS has become connected to racism, familialism and so on. It is argued that not only does the crisis of AIDS benefit from the radical questioning posture of postmodernism, it is also possible to see that 'sexual theory and politics are being yet again transfigured by their mediation through the construct of epidemic' (Singer, 1993:27).[12] While Singer sees this as an opportunity to turn away from 'the noble claims and tropes of philosophy - truth, knowledge, logic, order' (Singer, 1993:26) I would argue that we might benefit from a critical *re-evaluation* of these concepts. I cannot accept those views that claim we must accept a postmodernist lack of 'over-riding values' (Small, 1993:24). Indeed, I believe the urgency of the issues surrounding AIDS raises searching questions for those varieties of postmodernism that reject enlightenment ideals outright .[13]

At the most general level, it can be said that postmodernism rejects the Enlightenment's faith in the connection between 'reason, knowledge, science, freedom and human happiness' (Flax, 1990:8). The death of 'Man', history and metaphysics that Flax (1990) claims are the legacy of postmodernism, all contribute to a profound scepticism with regard to emancipatory politics.

> Emancipatory politics is rejected because so much of what the old social movements designated as emancipatory (seeking justice, freedom from inequality and oppression), [...] turned out to be oppressive. Besides, any plan for emancipation implies a "general prescription, a coherent plan, a program" (Rosenau, 1992:146).

Neil Small (1993:23) uses this postmodern perspective in the context of AIDS and argues that 'postmodern AIDS' rejects 'an overriding belief in human progress and emancipation' and favours a new sexual ethics of 'polymorphous eroticism'. This new sexual ethic is suggestive of Foucault's play of 'bodies/pleasures'. Foucault's work raises important and

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12.   See also Yingling on how 'the material effects of AIDS deplete so many of our cultural assumptions about identity, justice, desire, and knowledge that is seems at times able to threaten the entire system of Western thought' (Yingling, 1991:292).

13.   There are however various 'species' of 'postmodern AIDS'. For example Jeffrey Weeks' most recent discussions of AIDS argue that values (of a radical humanist kind) are vital to creating critique and ways of life that meet the challenge of responding to sexual diversity in an age of AIDS. However here I am concerned with those writers who specifically reject an emancipatory politics of sexual freedom.

searching questions about the relationship between sex and power, otherness, heterogeneity and difference and the possibilities of a 'liberty' that is, if not 'outside' of power then at least in critical tension with it. Unlike some 'postmodern' theorists (e.g. Lyotard and Baudrillard) Foucault does have some notion of resistance to power which is why he remains of interest to feminist and gay commentators on sexuality and AIDS. Rajchman encapsulates the heart of Foucault's project well when he argues that 'Foucault invents a philosophy not of foundations but of risk; *a philosophy that is the endless question of freedom*' (Rajchman, 1985b:114 - my emphasis). Foucault is therefore central to this thesis and the debates it traverses, not so much because he provides the most adequate answers to the questions I raise (though his questions are always provocative and challenging), but because he stands at the centre of debates about sexuality (in the way that Marx for many years defined a critical approach to capitalism).

The broad rejection of emancipatory politics found in postmodernism is mirrored in Foucault's writings on sexual liberation. Projects of sexual liberation are to be distrusted as discursive tropes that in practice further ensnare individuals within disciplinary forms of power. Foucault argues that the incitement to sex, which has latterly been seen as a means by which sexual *liberation* might be procured, works by linking the *truth* of the 'self' to the confessions of one's sexuality. Rather than being 'emancipatory' this is simply another (and more subtle) form of domination that categorises individuals, attaches them to their identities and traps them in an identification which is already linked to disciplinary mechanisms of power. This Foucauldian critique of sexual liberation is now well established in much academic literature as a 'truth' in its own right.

Foucault's work has been taken up by many commentators on the AIDS crisis.[14] Many of these writers argue that the very nature of this crisis, and the ways in which it is embedded in forms of disciplinary power, mean that a sexual politics around AIDS must not fall into the trap of modernist sexual politics which are premised on liberating individuals from repressive forms of power. For example Linda Singer (1993) has developed an argument

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14.   For example Crimp (1988), Patton, (1990a, 1996), Halperin (1995), Treichler (1987), Grover (1988), Bersani (1988), Seidman (1992), Weeks (1995).

within a clearly articulated Foucauldian framework. She suggests that the historically contingent set of meanings around AIDS which is dominated by 'the logic of the epidemic' forces a certain circumspection with respect to a goal of sexual liberation (Singer, 1993). As a 'sexual epidemic', AIDS shares with other 'epidemics' a certain logic that mobilises particular social and political responses. Epidemics function not only as metaphors for the social,[15] but in so far as they 'function as a ground for the mobilisation of social resources...they also function as political logics, forms of social rationality' (Singer, 1993:27). Drawing on Albert Camus' discussion of the meaning of plagues, Singer argues that AIDS profoundly ruptures the optimistic logic of the sexual revolution: 'it stalls and limits liberal optimism, especially the proliferative notion of *choice,* the expansive notion of *progress'* (Singer, 1993:29 - my emphasis). Epidemic logic works by 'proliferating what it seeks to contain, producing what it regulates' (Singer, 1993:29).

Drawing on Foucault's determination of what constitutes an epidemic situation, Singer argues that 'the epidemic provides an occasion and a rationale for multiplying points of intervention into the lives of bodies and populations [...] Sexual epidemic provides access to bodies and a series of codes for inscribing them, as well as providing a discourse of justification (Singer, 1993:117). This typification of the operation of power through incitement and production leads to a rejection of sexual politics modelled around the idea of liberating sexuality from repressive forces. The sexual epidemic of AIDS does not lead to a situation in which one chooses between pleasure and power, or between liberation or repression (Singer, 1993:71, 82).

> It will take a certain kind of discipline to live and work without appeal to a political imaginary dominated by ... the utopic possibilities of liberated pleasures, to engage in a struggle that will lack the dogmatic clarity of revolutionary struggles waged in the name of sex, pleasure, desire against forces that seek its annihilation (Singer, 1993:70).

Rather Singer argues that while we might be caught between the discursive figures of sexual liberation and sexual epidemic, the challenge for sexual politics is to develop sophisticated means by which one can make 'strategic choices *between* disciplinary mechanisms' (Singer,

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15.   The epidemic of AIDS is seen as a metaphor in which contagion and a certain form of desire are seen as identical. The connection between certain sexual practices and diseases is conflated into the notion that 'certain types of sex *are* diseases' (Weeks, 1985:46).

1993:65-6 - my emphasis). However questions still remain. How are we to *decide* between better and worse disciplinary mechanisms? And how are these decisions to be *justified*? For the Foucauldian 'everything is dangerous', therefore 'the ethico-political choice we have to make every day is to determine which is the *main* danger' (Foucault, 1984b:343 - my emphasis). Unfortunately it is still not at all clear *how* are we to decide *which* is 'the most dangerous disciplinary mechanism'. Neither Foucault nor Singer provide us with the theoretical means by which we might determine which disciplines are dangerous and which are 'empowering' (or at least not disempowering) for individuals. This theoretical lacuna is a legacy of the genealogical form of critique that is inherited from Foucault.

Briefly, genealogy can be typified as an 'ontology of the present'. That is, it is concerned with breaking with the normality associated with 'truth'/doxa, it is instead 'a telling about and against what is said and what must be said, a telling which seeks out its possibility in the "otherwise" of doxa' (Morey, 1992:118). An ontology of the present is concerned to identify the role of reason and its effects on us. Foucault was concerned with understanding who we are and how particular constructions of selves have proceeded through the imposition of certain *limits* upon individuals. The purpose of critique is therefore to *identify* these limits and thereby provide a means by which we might *transgress* them through permanent critique and re-creation of ourselves. The responsibility is not to act (in the sense of liberatory action) but to 'otherness' - to the production of various and multiple selves and knowledge (Richters, 1988). Norms are rejected because they establish new limits and by definition these constrain us. For Foucault the purpose of criticism is to analyse and reflect on limits that are imposed on us and to find modes of action that *transgress* these limits without establishing new norms. However, this kind of approach is problematic because, as Benhabib argues, it is not possible to be exempt:

> from the task of evaluative, ideal-typical reconstruction. Social criticism *needs* philosophy precisely because the narratives of our cultures are so conflictual and irreconcilable that, even when one appeals to them, a certain ordering of one's normative priorities, a statement of the methodological assumptions guiding one's choice of narratives, and a clarification of those principles in the name of which one speaks is unavoidable (Benhabib, 1992:226 - my emphasis).

While Foucauldian-inspired critique has been enormously useful in producing a critique of the normative and disciplinary forms of power that are associated with the regulation of

sexuality and the production of safe sex knowledges, I will argue that it is hamstrung by the limits of genealogical criticism. In contrast to a Foucauldian form of critique I favour an approach that can be located in a broadly-defined 'critical social theory' (particularly as developed by Seyla Benhabib, Charles Taylor and Craig Calhoun). In the next section I make a case in favour of an ethics of authenticity and an emancipatory notion of sexual freedom.

Moral Sources for Radical Sexual Politics: Emancipation and Authenticity

By the later 1980s the idea of sexual revolution was good mainly for a horse-laugh, or a nanosecond of nostalgia in the world of the new puritanism. And yet ... Where did the 'Safe Sex' strategy for AIDS prevention come from, if not from a submerged sexual-liberation current within gay communities? What are the "post-feminist" young women of the 1980s and 1990s if not assertive about their own rights to sexual pleasure? [...] *In some form then we still need sexual revolution* (Connell, 1993:2, 3 - my emphasis).

While some postmodernist commentators have seen in AIDS the chance to reject an emancipatory sexual politics anew, others have argued that we *need* such a politics. I would suggest that an alternative to the Foucauldian rejection of sexual liberation can be built through a form of critical social theory. Seyla Benhabib's exploration of critical social theory (1986, 1992) takes its inspiration from the Frankfurt School's theoretical project which was 'situated between practical philosophy and social science, sharing and radically reformulating the intentions of both' (Benhabib, 1986:3). Moreover the task of critical social theory is *emancipatory* - 'its goal is man's [sic] emancipation from relationships that enslave him' (Benhabib, 1986:4). If it is accepted that the sexual realm involves 'relationships' of power that 'enslave' then an understanding of sexual freedom requires the social critic to explore how a term such as sexual liberation has been constructed. In other words it is necessary to do something like what Somers and Gibson call 'historical epistemology'. This refers to the appropriation and interpretation of 'knowledge histories through a reconstruction of their making, resonance, and contestedness over time' (Somers and Gibson, 1994:44). An understanding of wherein 'sexual freedom' might 'really' lie would benefit from an exploration of how theoretical discussions of this concept have been constructed through their location in historical moments rich with their own political and social concerns. Such an approach accepts that:

> Social theory is as much history and narrative as it is metatheory. In its very construction all theory presumes a prior question to which the theory is designed to answer [...] - hence the theory itself is already an intervening moment in a narrative process of knowledge construction. In the form of an "answer", social theory contains a historicity which can be disclosed by discovering both the original historical problem it was designed to solve and the complex ways in which answer has found its way into the core of our most presuppositional concepts (Somers and Gibson, 1994:45).

One means by which the social critic might proceed is suggested by Charles Taylor with his argument that it is important to be 'articulate' about the 'moral sources' that motivate politically engaged work. For Taylor 'being articulate' involves explicitly expressing the 'hypergoods' that motivate critique. It involves making 'qualitative distinctions' between different ideals. Qualitative distinctions function 'as an orienting sense of what is important, valuable, or commanding, which emerges in our particulate intuitions about how we should act, feel, respond on different occasions, and on which we draw when we deliberate about ethical matters' (Taylor, 1989:77-78). This orienting sense is a form of substantive rationality in which deciding about what is 'good' takes priority over the proceduralist focus on what it is 'right' to do. Taylor argues that reasoning about what is better or worse cannot occur outside of moral frameworks that are taken to be good. Moral reasoning must therefore involve strong evaluations. These evaluations involve what Taylor calls hypergoods. These are values or principles that are higher than other lesser goods. He gives as an example 'equal respect'. This was conceived in early modern times as the negation of heirarchical views of society but now finds new applications, for example in relation to patriarchal relations (that were initially ignored by earlier advocates of equal respect). For Taylor, this example demonstrates that by viewing equal respect as a hypergood that is 'incomparably higher' than other goods, we can build on it and use it as a standard 'by which contemporary views can be criticized and sometimes found wanting' (Taylor, 1989:65). In becoming more articulate about ideals to be retrieved and recuperated, alternatives are canvassed and shown to be better or worse. 'Truth' is therefore a matter of 'epistemic gain'. Whilst no account of a phenomenon or situation can be 'true' in any direct and absolute sense, some accounts can be shown to our satisfaction to be more adequate, fuller, more subtle, and so on, than others. The process might also of course uncover epistemic *loss,* a consideration that Taylor did not discuss, but that Calhoun suggests

is implied in Taylor's argument, and that Connell refers to in relation to sexual liberation:

> That a real revolution is involved was perfectly clear to women's liberation and gay liberation activists and theorists around 1970, and is exactly what has been lost in the evolution of theory since (Connell, 1995a:390).

The process of critique therefore involves a form of moral reasoning in *transitions* in which conceptions of the good are invoked.   In order to develop an analytically sound understanding of sexual freedom we are helped rather than hindered through exploring theories of sexual liberation - not because they hold all the answers, but because they help us in coming to an:

> understanding of our present moral stances, [and] also for ideas as to what may have fallen by the wayside or may have been shifted from foreground to background not because it was worthless but because of the particular configuration of any previous transition. [...] Historical inquiry is thus important not only methodologically, but also in order to discover once powerful, now hidden *moral sources* (Calhoun, 1991:242-3 - my emphasis).

My defense of sexual liberation as an important moral source for contemporary radical sexual politics does not entail its uncritical acceptance. Sexual liberation has typically been understood as 'liberating sexuality'. From this perspective, sexuality is an attribute of humans that has to be freed from the fetters of repressive power. However this view of sexual liberation is problematic because, as Bob Connell suggests, 'sexuality' cannot be liberated.

> The conception of libido in need of release is based on a category-mistake about human action. We act sexually, we become sexual, but we are not constituted from the start as sexual beings. We are not driven, and we cannot act so as to liberate what is in the process of being constituted. The goal of radical politics, therefore, cannot be the "liberation of sexuality" from social constraint. We can no more liberate libido than we can liberate the square root of minus one. There is no Thing there to liberate (Connell, 1995a:384).

What can be liberated are people who 'gain power over their own lives, power that was formerly exercised by other groups' (Connell, 1995a:390). Connell's argument in favour of 'sexual revolution' is situated within an emancipatory framework[16] and is concerned with overthrowing institutions, utilising mass action and looking forward to a new social order

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16.   Giddens usefully defines emancipatory politics as 'a generic outlook concerned above all with liberating individuals and groups from constraints which adversely affect their life chances. Emancipatory politics involves two main elements: the effort to shed shackles of the past thereby permitting a transformative attitude towards the future; and the aim of overcoming illegitimate domination of some individuals or groups by others' (Giddens, 1991:210-211).

(Connell, 1995a:390). Such an emancipatory sexual politics involves the 'democratisation of sexual social relations' in institutions as well as in face-to-face interactions. Democratisation in turn involves equalising resources; sharing decision-making; and ensuring that the process continues into the future. In the context of HIV risk and safe sex in heterosexual relations this approach can be expanded thus: 'Equalising resources' involves the material and cultural empowerment of women. Such a process must contest women's vulnerability to sexual violence, their economic and social dependence on men and must foster social respect. A lack of respect for women's sexual autonomy is manifested through a singular notion of sex as a 'coital imperative'. There is no single 'women's desire' and the diversity of choices made by women must be respected. 'Shared decision-making' invokes the notion of 'direct rule by the citizens' (Connell, 1995a:391). In the context of heterosexual relations the 'citizens' of the encounter are the men and women involved. There has to be some recognition that a sexual encounter involves a series of decisions and choices, no matter how 'spontaneous' the situation feels. To be in control of such encounters requires 'disclosure and negotiation' (Connell, 1995a:391) on the part of the participants. It also requires a commitment by each to listen to the other. 'Making sure the process continues' is what distinguishes a democratic enterprise from a personal claim. As such the democratic enterprise includes educational processes and forms of political organisation that can ensure that there is continuity in the provision of resources for others.

This *emancipatory* sexual politics certainly captures an important dimension of the project for sexual freedom. It focuses on a realm of freedom characterised by concerns of justice and equality. However as Giddens (1991) points out, this form of politics alone does not encapsulate all the concerns of radical politics in high modernity. In addition to an emancipatory politics Giddens argues that *life politics* raise questions of choice and lifestyle.[17] These questions are not trivial, referring as they do to self-identity and self-actualisation. In relation to the issues surrounding HIV risk, sexual relations most certainly should be located within a broadly democratic and emancipatory polity, but this politics is intimately connected with concerns about questions of how individuals should *live* their

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17.   Giddens distinguishes between emancipation as concerned with life chance and 'the conditions which liberate us in order to make choices', while life politics 'is a politics *of* choice' (Giddens, 1991:214 - original emphasis).

sexual lives in 'safety' and 'freedom'. Such decisions involve considerations about the choices that are made between forms of safe sex (e.g. using condoms, limiting the numbers of partners, partner selection, 'not bothering' and so on). These decisions are shaped by the constraints that emancipatory politics highlights but they are also connected to personal identities and values. Decisions about safe sex involve moral reasoning and as was suggested above, this must involve strong evaluations.

Charles Taylor develops an ethics of authenticity that addresses questions of life politics. He has suggested that the modern self is characterised by an ideal of 'authenticity' - that individuals should be true to themselves and to their own particular way of being (Taylor, 1994:28). Taylor outlines the historical emergence of such an understanding of identity at the end of the eighteenth century. Drawing on the writings of Rousseau and Herder, he argues that the modern Western identity is at least partly constituted through the idea that:

> each of us has an original way of being human [...] There is a certain way of being human that is *my* way. I am called upon to live my life in this way, and not in imitation of anyone else's life. But this notion gives a new importance to being true to myself. If I am not, I miss the point of my life; I miss what being human is for *me* (Taylor, 1994:30 - original emphasis).

As suggested in the introduction, authenticity is a moral ideal that is 'unrepudiable by moderns' (Taylor, 1994:23). The ethics of authenticity that Taylor develops is clearly linked to a particular understanding of how moral reasoning should proceed. And connected to this is an understanding of human identity. For Taylor freedom consists in the practice of a substantive rationality[18] in which priority is given to 'the good'. That is, it is assumed that reasoning cannot occur outside of moral frameworks that are taken to be good. Moral reasoning (for the individual and theorist alike) must therefore involve strong evaluations. Taylor (1989:36) identifies two important dimensions of modern identity. One cannot be a self on one's own, rather to be a self in modern society requires:

(i)   that one take a stand on moral and spiritual matters (the good); and

(ii)   that identity requires reference to a defining community.

Taking the first of these dimensions, Taylor makes the claim that it is a condition of being a

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18.   This is in contrast to a procedural rationality in which decisions are made on the basis of what it is right to do. In other words moral decisions proceed by focussing on the reasoning style and method employed. What is highlighted is the free and autonomous choice of the individiual.

functioning self, that is having a degree of agency, that as humans we must speak from a moral orientation that we take to be right. Taylor does not present this as a metaphysical view but rather one grounded in a particular understanding of human action. He believes that it is utterly impossible for us to live without frameworks that provide us with 'strongly qualified horizons' that are constitutive of human agency.

> Our orientation in relation to the good requires not only some frameworks which defines the shape of the qualitatively higher but a sense of where we stand in relation to this [...] We have to place ourselves in a space that is defined by qualitative distinctions. What is good or of fundamental value - where we stand in relation to this must matter to us. What would be a rich meaningful life against an empty one (Taylor, 1989:27).

While I argue that emancipation is a necessary aspect of a politics of sexual liberation, the focus of this thesis is primarily on the level of life politics and more particularly on the relation between authenticity and autonomy. Sexual freedom and an ethics of authenticity in this context refers to an understanding of autonomy as something more than an atomised self-determination. Such a concern for questions of authenticity, autonomy, equality and justice is central to the gay and feminist projects for safe sex. These safe sex projects are clearly distinct from the state-funded AIDS prevention campaigns which have typically focused on a technical level.

The Safe Sex Project: Narratives of Sexual Freedom in an Age of Risk

'Safer sex *is* sexual liberation' (Patton, 1989:244 - my emphasis).

In the previous section I suggested that the idea of 'sexual liberation' has been rejected by many AIDS critics as a model for sexual politics. However, this rejection of an *emancipatory* model of sexual freedom has not lead to foregoing altogether the pursuit of sexual pleasures in a post-AIDS world. What is contested is not the notion that sexual pleasures are a 'right' or 'good' of some kind, rather that *modernist* undertandings of sexual freedom are unhelpful. While Cindy Patton's claim that 'safer sex is sexual liberation' is unlikely to be recognised by all, it is clear that the safe sex project as conceived by gay men and some feminists works with a recognition that 'sexual freedom' of some kind is essential. This notion that safe sex is *liberatory* rather than *limiting* developed in opposition to a commonsense view that the prevention of HIV through safe sex is a 'limitation' on sexual

practice and pleasure.

Broadly 'progressive' ideas about safe sex are being constructed through connecting the reduction of risk with questions of what is to count as 'good' (i.e. 'great' and 'ethical') sex. In an era of AIDS, safe sex is not purely a technical question of which acts are most and least risky, most and least safe, how to use a condom 'properly' and so on. It is also fundamentally an ethical and political question. The safe sex project entails exploring *which* acts, identities and pleasures are to be accepted and privileged as being better than others. In this section I will explore the tensions within both gay and feminist approaches to the safe sex project. Debates, within the gay community and between feminists, about the most appropriate formulation of the safe sex project are shaped through longer-standing debates about sexuality, power and freedom. However here I wish to explore:

(i)   how debates over the meaning and significance of identity are central to gay notions of safe sex; and

(ii)   debates amongst feminists about the role of permissive and women-centred discourses in empowering women.

The Gay Safe Sex Project: Troubling Identities

Our challenge is to figure out how we can have gay, life-affirming sex, satisfy our emotional needs, and stay alive! (*How to Have Sex in an Epidemic* [1983], quoted in Patton, 1990a:45).

'Safe sex' as a means of protecting gay men from sickness developed even before it was understood that HIV was the biological agent responsible for AIDS. The earliest guidelines developed in the leaflet 'How to Have Sex in an Epidemic' were governed by a libertarian sexual ethic that did not require the abandonment of sexual pleasure. However gay safe sex politics quickly became the site of debates which were inevitably influenced by broader divisions around the meanings of sexual freedom, identity and community. Seidman (1992:170-175) argues that the main division is one between celebrating a 'free-wheeling, polymorphous sexuality' that is the centre of gay identity and community and a 'romantic sexual ideology' which is critical of casual, anonymous and fetishised forms of sex. As indicated earlier, some gay men saw in AIDS the failure of a way of life associated with 'promiscuity', anonymous sex and multiple sex partners (Seidman, 1992:163-166). AIDS

therefore provided the opportunity for some to think of safe sex as a rejection of a 'libertarian' ethic in favour of a more 'romantic' one. From this point of view safe sex is constituted as a new 'mature' form of gay sexuality mediated through intimacy, fidelity and monogamy. A New Zealand gay man reflects this ethic when talking about the changes that the AIDS epidemic has wrought for him:

> I would like to see relationships formed with more of a wooing period. Too often you get to know each other in bed before you actually get to know each other. I think it would be really good if there was a lot more time that you spent getting to know somebody before you actually jumped into bed. That would be one thing I'd like to change (quoted in Ryan, 1991:32).

While this perspective certainly has its defenders, a more influential politics and ethic for safe sex promotion is found in the notion that the appropriate response to HIV risk is through some form of gay liberationist approach to sexual practice. Such an approach, broadly communitarian in its ethos, is the dominant discourse of gay-oriented AIDS organisations[19] and includes eroticising safe sex, expanding ideas about what constitutes sex, and defending multiple partners. Simon Watney summarises this perspective:

> Safer sex constitutes both an erotics *and* an ethics; it has established a set of collective cultural practices that combine the affirmation of sexual desire in all its forms with an active, practical commitment to mutual care and responsibility... gay identity should *mean* safer sex (Watney, 1990b:31 - original emphasis).

Here Watney connects safe sex with sexual liberation through identifying the central importance of safe sex to gay identity and community. He argues against an approach to safe sex that focuses only on the provision of information in the form of lists of safe and unsafe sexual practices. This approach reduces safe sex to a 'series of *techniques*, rather than as a way of life, or as a question of collective *cultural practices'* (Watney, 1990b:24 - original emphasis). In contrast to seeing safe sex as a range of techniques to be employed, Watney advocates a safe sex project concerned with providing 'a level of general, collective cultural empowerment, encouraging us to be able to identify one another's needs, and to think of ourselves as a community united in response to the epidemic' (Watney, 1990b:24).

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19.   It has also been supported by empirical studies such as the Social Aspects of AIDS Project where it was found that the best predictors of the adoption of safe sex practices were 'sexual and social engagement in the gay community - the greater the engagement, the greater the adoption of safe sex' (Kippax, Connell, Dowsett and Crawford, 1993:122).

The New Zealand AIDS Foundation clearly articulates this type of safe sex project. For example in its 1992 'Reporting to the Gay Community' the Foundation described its prevention work as focusing on:

> the two most important factors associated with increased risk from HIV:
> *   low self-esteem (especially due to unresolved *sexual identity*)
> *   lack of *community* support
> This is why our prevention work takes a *gay community development approach*. We put a lot of emphasis on community events, projects and resources which encourage our community to be more supportive of safe sex and being gay (NZAF, 1992, my emphasis).

Cindy Patton (1996:108-110) also identifies this gay community and liberationist approach as being a strong element in American safe sex projects from the mid-80s. She describes this approach as one in which safe sex is seen not as a problem but as a 'norm in process'. Safe sex is located in the context of a strong gay community and associated with resisting homophobic culture.

> Safe sex was viewed as part of the larger and ongoing project of sexual liberation [...] Instead of being a separate and individualistic campaign for personal change, safe sex organising was to be closely allied with both HIV/AIDS and gay liberation projects (Patton, 1996:109).

In general this 'gay community' project of safe sex, dominant in Western developed societies, uses a form of ethics in which the interests of the gay community and the individual gay man are identified with each other. A solidaristic, communitarian ethos is valued and a strong gay identity is seen as being essential to developing a context in which safe sex is supported.

However, while this approach has been a powerful one in gay AIDS organisations, the way in which gay identity and safe sex have been closely identified with each other raises the question of what meaning safe sex can have for those men who are homosexually-active but because of class, ethnicity, culture, or location in a largely heterosexual world (as either married or bisexual) do not see themselves in terms of a gay identity. These men may not recognise safe sex, in the terms in which it is addressed to gay men, as a category which applies to them. Therefore the question of 'difference' that has played such a large part in theoretical debates about identity and has been central to recent gay theory, has an even more immediate resonance for gay men active in safe sex education and advocacy. Cindy Patton expresses this general concern in her critique of those approaches to safe sex that rely

on a unitary notion of identity. She is critical of the way in which a focus on gay identity in AIDS organisations 'tended to reify the idea that acquiring a positive gay identity was a prerequisite to practising safe sex' (Patton, 1996:110). She argues that the 'global promotion of the urban-core-type gay identity' (Patton, 1996:111) ignores the homosexually-active men whose identities are constituted less through the notion of 'gay' than other class, ethnic or cultural locations. Moreover, the community to whom much safe sex material is directed, is more plural than gay liberationist discourse assumes. Both identity and community, therefore, 'must be radically rethought' (Patton, 1996:140).

The problem that Patton identifies here about the differences that constitute the selves of homosexually-active men has been explored in two main ways. The first approach higlights the multiple, contexual and shifting nature of identity. In this model, identity is pluralised but there remains an implicit recognition that identity refers to 'categories' that are meaningful at some level. Identity is still understood as involving a question of 'who I am'. A second, more far-reaching critique of identity is found in queer theory where self-identity is seen as being performative and concerned less with questions of *who* I am than *where* I am (see Patton, 1996).

The reflections of Deverill and Prout (1995), the evaluators of the MESMAC study[20] in Britain, are a useful exemplar of this first approach. They argue that the broad range of men who have sex with men (hereafter MSM) confound those gay models of safe sex education that are based on the idea that sexual identity is a useful category for organising AIDS prevention education. These men, some of whom accept a gay identity in some contexts but not others, some of whom do not understand themselves in terms of being gay (preferring to see themselves as bisexual or even heterosexual), and yet others (for example black or Asian men) see other aspects of their identity as being more important than their sexual identity, point to the necessity of 'recognizing and addressing diversity' that is at the heart of identity. This understanding of identity as 'multiple, contested and contextual' leads Deverill and Prout to look to more 'processual ways' of thinking about identity and in this

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20.   MESMAC is the ancronym for Men Who Have Sex With Men - Action in the Community. This was
        a three year community development study funded by the Health Education Authority. See Prout and
        Deverell (1995) for a discussion of their evaluation of this project.

context they quote Stuart Hall approvingly (Deverill and Prout, 1995:187).

> Identity is not as transparent or unproblematic as we think. Perhaps instead of
> thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact ... we should think, instead, of
> identity as a "production", which is never complete, always in process, and always
> constituted within, not outside, representation (Hall, 1990:222).

On the basis of this analysis, Deverill and Prout advocate an approach that recognises
difference *within* the category of homosexually-active men and they argue that identity is
an analytically problematic category to use as the basis of politics. In its place they suggest
using the concept of 'affinity', developed by Donna Haraway (1990) in relation to feminist
theory. They argue that this concept helps to move away from a totalising notion of
identity, yet still allows the possibility of collective action. Affinity suggests that unities
are *built* rather than simply assumed on the basis of naturalised identity categories. More
importantly, they argue that such an approach to safe sex politics 'seems likely to lead to
more flexible and creative alliances and to involve more sensitivity to the multiplicity of
difference. In consequence more people will be able to participate in HIV prevention
initiatives than if these are organized around identity alone' (Deverill and Prout, 1995:190).

While this latter approach apparently deals with the question of difference in a way that is
faithful to the experiences and self-identifications of individuals, it has recently faced a
challenge from a 'queer' perspective. This approach questions the notion that either gay
identity or *community,* as they have been commonly conceptualised, should be central to the
politics and practice of safe sex for homosexually-active men. Cindy Patton in her most
recent book makes this case:

> Insurrections capable of making sex safe (from disease *and* social representation)
> do not require recruiting everyone to gay identity. [...] The next step may be to stop
> using the term "safe - even safer - sex" and to reject any idea of a wholesome "gay
> lifestyle". Instead, we must think about sex as the form of power that makes and
> saves queer lives (Patton, 1996:154, 155 - original emphasis).

The 'rethinking' that Patton suggests is one located in a broadly defined 'queer paradigm'.
This does not entail the complete rejection of 'gay liberationist roots' (Patton, 1996:140)
but it must take account of the fundamental diversity that constitutes the 'communities' of
homosexually active men (and women). 'Queer' is a preferred term because it does not
require a belief that sexual 'identity' is constituted through 'a particular psychic sexual

structure' (Patton, 1996:151). Rather a *spatial* metaphor is preferred in which individuals are placed within particular, and multiple, sexual vernaculars. Being a sexual person is less about 'who I am' or an 'abstract identification as "gay"' and rather more about 'a certain "knowledge" of *"where* I am"' (Patton, 1996:149 - my emphasis).

Patton's notion of 'sexual vernaculars' is an attempt to extricate politics out from between the liberal realm of privacy (and appeals to tolerance and acceptance) and liberationist desires to 'be out' in the public world as a valid 'ethnic-like' minority. She shares the queer dislike of 'minoritising' discourse and pursues a politics organised around opposition to heteronormativity. Patton is critical of those approaches to safe sex that require a new 'maturity' because she believes that such an approach neglects the way in which sex for many, if not most, gay men is about cultural and psychic *transgression*. Patton discusses cruising as an example of a sexual vernacular that meets the queer criteria of being transgressive, is unconnected to notions of gay identity and is situated in relation to metaphors of time and space. The cruising man or woman is offered as the kind of 'performative identity' that queer theory suggests is the appropriate alternative to the 'authentic' selves of the gay liberationist and community-development approaches discussed above.

These discussions of difference within the category of homosexually-active men touch on important issues in relation to safe sex education, as well as a broader project of sexual freedom. They have significantly shifted the way in which gay identity is understood, and a concern with the diversity that exists within MSM is very properly highlighted. However, I would like to suggest that neither of these approaches adequately accounts for sexual self-identity. Where identity is pluralised and seen as constantly in process, there is a danger of ignoring the continuity that exists within an individual's sense of self. While it is quite clear that a sense of self does shift over time and that there are differences within the self, these are typically interpreted by individuals through a process in which difference and change is located within a narrative of the self. It is these self-narratives, or what Somers and Gibson (1994) have called 'narrative identities' that provide some form of stability and unity within selves, even as they are constituted through difference. It is my contention that a strongly categorical approach to identity is insufficiently attentive to the narrative

elements of identity, and the queer paradigm fails to capture the dialogical nature and value-situatedness of homosexual sex. A more thorough discussion and justification of this stance is developed in Chapter Four.

A Feminist Safe Sex Project: Permissive and/or Women-centred?

> The crisis surrounding AIDS makes it clear that today we have to push further with those ideas that feminists developed out of the "sexual revolution". [...] we should be talking about *expanding* people's notions of sexual relationships and about sexual practices (possible and pleasurable) (Segal, 1989:139 - my emphasis).

While the characterisation of AIDS as a gay disease has limited the popular rethinking of heterosexual relations, some feminist commentary has identified the ways in which the risk of HIV infection has profound implications for gendered sexual relations. For example Rosalind Coward (1987) has suggested that AIDS and a move to the greater use of condoms, might contribute to a transformation in the balance of power between the sexes. Coward argues that the sexual revolution had different consequences for men and women. It was a contradictory revolution that may have provided women with a weapon against the double standard, but it also provided men with an excuse to demand more sex from women who could be accused of being uptight if they said 'no'. In this context, the risk of HIV infection may push to the forefront the issue of penetrative sex which feminists have argued may not give women the most satisfactory sexual pleasure.

> Perhaps AIDS could be [...] a pause used for people to find about each other, about less obvious pleasures, and a moment where sexuality could be redefined as something other than male discharge into any kind of receptacle. In this new context where penetration might literally spell death, there is a chance for a massive relearning about sexuality (Coward, 1987:21).

Coward's optimism is not shared by all feminists. Just as some gay men see in the AIDS crisis the *failure* of 'sexual freedom', so too feminists such as Erica Jong are not sad to see its passing. Jong (who once praised the 'zipless fuck') welcomes AIDS because it makes sex 'a little more mysterious and precious again' (Jong, 1986:65 quoted in Segal, 1994:69). Some feminists are therefore cautious about the notion of 'safe sex', if that term is understood in terms of expansiveness and freedom, because it is seen as neglecting the role of male power in women's experience of sex.

It is therefore possible to draw a crude distinction in the feminist debates about safe sex between those who argue that 'fucking and freedom' are mutually exclusive and those who argue that they are not.[21] Those holding to the   former view conceptualise feminism as 'anti-heterosexual pleasure' and heterosexual pleasure is seen as being 'anti-women' (Segal, 1994:309). From such a perspective 'AIDS not only highlights the potential dangers of heterosexuality as a form of sexual practice, it also underlines the importance of heterosexuality as a primary institution of women's oppression' (Richardson, 1994a:53). Tamsin Wilton's work is paradigmatic of this strand of feminist writing which suggests that women 'on the whole, derive little pleasure from heterosexual sex ... that they are not able to ask for what they want ... that their pleasure is not taken into account in their relationships, that they are in fact *utterly disempowered*, silenced, ignored, and often engage in sexual activity in conditions of fear and physical discomfort' (Wilton, 1994a:87-8 - my emphasis). As well as this critique of the institution of heterosexuality, the specific practice of penetrative intercourse is targeted as being particularly problematic.

> Safer sex demands that we de-emphasize penetration. Safer sex also demands that partners negotiate sexual practice. Yet it is clear that both demands are quite simply impossible within the context of heteropatriarchal discourse which constructs sex as penetration of a woman by a man, privileging male sexual pleasure and constructing female subjectivity as powerless and androcentric (Wilton, 1994a:90).

Penetration is a problem both for its connection to the possible transmission of HIV (and other sexually transmitted diseases and unwanted pregnancy) as well as for its role in 'heteropatriarchal discourse' such that it privileges 'male sexual pleasure and [constructs] female subjectivity as powerless, pleasureless and androcentric' (Wilton, 1994a:90). Penetration takes on a symbolic meaning as the 'assertion of male power over disempowered other (sic)' (Wilton, 1991:154). This occurs within a context that reinforces women's passivity and men's activity. Feminists are therefore interested in constructing a different mode of sexual relating and autonomy for women. The critique of a problematic masculine heterosexuality is joined by a desire for a more 'women-centred sexuality'.

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21.   A less blunt distinction is made by Diane Richardson who suggests that there are two main feminist responses to AIDS. One she labels '"radical pluralism" (if not sexual libertarianism)' which is characterised by its affirmation of sexual choice and the diversity of sexual desires. The other feminist approach is defined by its *opposition* to a perceived libertarian approach within AIDS politics which is understood as having an 'insufficient critique of the relationship between sexuality and power' (Richardson, 1994a:55).

Against the idea that fucking and freedom are mutually exclusive, Cindy Patton argues that women can only make good choices about sex in the context of the expansion of our concept of sex, an increase in the discussion of pleasurable possibilities and an eroticisation of measures that reduce the transmission of all sexually transmitted diseases (Patton, 1989:250). Such a position does not necessarily entail the rejection of heterosexual pleasures. This pleasure-oriented perspective is also found in some of the lesbian writings on safe sex where HIV risk, 'no mater how tiny', is seen as necessarily informing what they do and how they will do it. For example Ardill and O'Sullivan ask:

> Will this necessity create the conditions for new erotic desires, sexualised parts of the body, and shifts in how we "get off"? Can old sexual fantasies complement new sexual practices? (Ardill and O'Sullivan, 1987 in Boffin, 1990b:161).[22]

This demarcation of the feminist response to AIDS, mirrors the pre-existing divisions of the feminist sexuality debates between an emphasis on pleasure as opposed to one on danger. While the differences that exist between these two perspectives has been emphasised above, there are several feminist studies that have sought to bring together a critique of masculine power without giving up on the possibility of women's heterosexual pleasure. In particular the work of the Macquarie Heterosexuality and AIDS Project has been concerned to get around the seeming opposition between these two positions, by arguing that it might be possible to build a feminist sexual politics around the combination of a 'permissive' discourse with a more 'women-centred' approach.

Kippax, Crawford, Waldby and Benton (1990) are optimistic that the 'permissive discourse' provides emancipatory potential for women.

> The permissive discourse provides the best starting point for the transformation of sexual practices, in its commitment to an experimental sexuality and its assumption of an active, feminine sexuality (Kippax, Crawford, Waldby and Benton, 1990:542).

However, they argue that this discourse is not sufficient on its own to empower women and it must be joined by a 'truly *women-centred* discourse of sexuality out of which male sexuality can be problematised' (Kippax, Crawford, Waldby and Benton, 1990:533 - original emphasis). Only under such conditions will women be able to insist on the kinds of sex that are both pleasurable and safe. The permissive discourse that Kippax et al

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22.   See also Susie Bright (1988) and O'Sullivan and Parmar (1992).

highlight, exists in a sexual field that includes two other structuring discourses.[23] The male sex drive discourse focuses on men's desire and on women fulfilling it. The have/hold discourse enjoins men to be committed to their partners and involves some responsibility as well as sexual rights. Finally the permissive discourse accords women equal access to the position of actively desiring subject. These discourses are said to structure the kinds of understandings and practices that form heterosexual relations. Each discourse has a different set of limits on 'the forms that negotiation may take' (Kippax et al, 1990:535).

This work is clearly of interest to feminists exploring the challenges that face women in an age of AIDS. Kippax et al characterise the permissive discourse as one which offers the possibility of egalitarian sexuality because women, theoretically anyway, have '*equal* access to the position of *subject* and thus to sexual desire' (Kippax et al, 1990:536 - my emphasis). It is through the gathering of sexual experience that women can negotiate sexual encounters. In the permissive discourse 'negotiation is rendered intelligible when men and women acknowledge women's sexual desire and women are empowered to give voice to that desire [...] women become the active subjects of desire. Sexual experience empowers' (Kippax et al, 1990:541). Moreover they suggest that women have the most power when they are the *initiators* of sexual contact. Under such conditions a woman is more able to ensure that not only does she recognise her own desires but that her partner 'recognises her desire and accepts her understanding of it' (Kippax et al, 1990:541). This ability to initiate and negotiate sexual encounters is more probable in casual rather than regular relationships. 'In a casual context the rules governing dialogue are more fluid so that sexual negotiation, rather than presenting an affront to heterosexual codes, can become part of the eroticism of the encounter itself' (Kippax et al, 1990:541).

However while Kippax et al recognise that the permissive discourse offers these potential openings for female sexual autonomy, the power of the woman sexual initiator is fragile. In order for women to maintain their integrity they must not allow sexual encounters to be construed within the hegemonic 'male sex drive discourse' in which men take what is 'rightfully' theirs (Kippax et al, 1990:535, 541). This is a constant threat because the

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23.   The authors are drawing on Wendy Hollway's (1984) suggestion that there are three influential discourses that structure the practice of heterosexual relations.

permissive discourse does not entail any notion of *responsibility* and any sexual encounter may end up as simply an 'affirmation of men's sexuality' (ibid). To guard against this danger a woman must not only be attractive to her partner but also to herself, and she must be committed to pleasing herself as much as him. In this context Kippax et al recognise that there is a problem with the permissive discourse, because it makes available to women positions that are on the same terms as men's. Given that heterosexual relations are structured through gendered power, this formal equality is unlikely to be achieved in reality. They therefore argue that women need a discourse that 'places women's sexuality at its *centre*' (Kippax et al, 1990:542). By placing female sexuality at the centre of sexual discourse women have a stronger voice and set up a position from which masculine sexuality might be problematised.

To some extent the general argument advanced above seems persuasive. It attempts to bridge what has sometimes been seen as the incompatibility for women between 'fucking' and 'freedom' by neither relinquishing women's desires and rights to sexual pleasure nor ignoring masculine power. However, I would argue that while fucking and freedom are not mutually exclusive, an analytical solution to their seeming incompatability cannot be found by simply joining together a women-centred and a permissive discourse. This argument is troubled by a contradiction in which mutuality and communication are valued in women's relationships with men but at the same time these writers want to hold on to some notion of a women-centred sexuality that can exist *independently* of relations with sexual partners. 'Independence' and a 'women-centred discourse of sexuality' do not sit comfortably alongside calls for 'mutuality'. For women who seek relationships with men, independence is difficult to sustain in the actual experience of heterosexual relationships. Moreover, where women are able to assert their sexual desires this is meaningless outside the *recognition* and acceptance of these desires by male partners. This is not to suggest that some accommodation between men and women is impossible, but rather to argue that 'independence' is not the best way to conceptualise the freedoms that women seek.

It can be argued that the feminist call for 'a female sexual desire which eludes and resists patriarchal relations' (Hollway, 1996:91) has foundered between the incompatible notions of independence (involved in a women-centred sexuality) and equality (which is

characteristic of the permissive discourse). An alternative way in which to conceptualise the relation between authenticity and autonomy for heterosexual women might be found in the notion of 'mutual recognition'. Recognition has both an ethical/political force as well as a resonance at the level of personal desire. At the level of personal sexual desire Wendy Hollway has suggested that the desire for recognition is fundamental to sexual relations between men and women (as well as in other sexual relationships). This desire for mutual recognition is not necessarily linked to patriarchal relations of power, but is an aspect of the constitution of the desiring/psychic self. From such a perspective, heterosexual desire does not necessarily lead to the eroticisation of gendered power difference. Mutual recognition is linked to feelings of trust and security in our partners. It is a desire to be recognised for who we really are. This recognition cannot exist outside being connected to, rather than independent from, men. Clearly this is difficult given the gendered power that men routinely exercise in sexual relationships, but it is not impossible or ruled out by the 'nature' of heterosexuality. Hollway argues that mutual recognition within heterosexual relationships is both possible and moreover it creates the condition for love and for 'an active and fulfillable sexual desire' (Hollway, 1996:105). Where mutual recognition between sexual partners occurs, there is an experience of safety that can be translated into:

> the experience of trusting specific others with an uncensored sexual self. Within this safety; the infantile experience of bliss may be translated into the adult experience of *jouissance* and experienced time and again - and therefore desired time and again - in sexual relating (Hollway, 1996:105).

I would like to suggest that mutual recognition is compatible with an ethics of authenticity as a moral source for women's safe sexual freedom.

Authenticity, Autonomy and Safe Sex

The notion of safe sex as a political project of sexual freedom must also be articulated in relation to lived experience if it is not to remain a utopian ideal, abstracted and disconnected from the real concerns of men and women. Both feminists and gay men take this project seriously, as a matter of life and death. There is little to be gained from AIDS critique if it cannot make sense of sex as it is lived by individuals. Turning questions of sexual freedom and safe sex to lived experience therefore requires some understanding of personal autonomy. Here I am guided by Benhabib's argument:

> Ego autonomy is characterised by a two-fold capacity: first, the individual's *reflexive* ability to question the interpretive framework fixed by the cultural tradition - to loosen, if you wish, those sedimented and frozen images of the good and happiness in the light of which we formulate needs and motives; second, such reflexive questioning is accompanied by an ability to *articulate* one's needs linguistically, by an ability to communicate with others about them (Benhabib, 1986:333).

Such a definition of autonomy is critical in intent, dialogical and able to be articulated in relation to both feminist and gay concerns around safe sex.

As outlined earlier, feminist debates about safe sex have tended to situate women's safety and autonomy in relation to permissive and women-centred discourses of sexuality. Both discourses suggest particular ways in which women's relative lack of sexual power might be addressed. This way of contextualising safe sex for women has informed empirical research so that questions of personal autonomy are typically explored in relation to some kind of concept of *empowerment*. The Women, Risk and AIDS project (hereafter WRAP) is an important feminist study, incorporating both critical and empirical elements, that has attempted to link an understanding of women's lived experience with broader feminist concerns. These authors have developed an argument that for women to be empowered to have safe sex they must:

> resist constructions of femininity in which they contribute to their own subordination, ... they have to have both a *critical consciousness* of disembodied femininity and *effective strategies* for their own empowerment (Holland, Ramazanoglu, Scott and Thomson, 1994:65 - my emphasis).

This discussion is reminiscent of Benhabib's definition of ego autonomy. However it extends the definition of autonomy from focusing on the ability to communicate about needs to the achievement in practice of changed sexual relations. Through the analysis of interview transcripts the WRAP authors concluded that there is a contradictory and contested *process* of empowerment for some women. It is an ongoing struggle rather than a stable category of knowledge or practice (Holland, Ramazanoglu, Scott, Sharpe and Thomson, 1992:146). For empowerment to be truly effective it requires both a process of critical *reflection* (intellectual empowerment) as well as the *transforming* of sexual experiences (experiential empowerment). Intellectual empowerment involves women critically reflecting on their experiences of pressured sex and developing a model of positive female sexuality. This has to be incorporated with an experiential empowerment in which

negotiation is put into practice. Empowerment at an experiential level is necessary for women to have some real control over their sexuality and this means 'achieving *in practice* a shift in the male domination of sexual encounters' (Holland, Ramazanoglu, Sharpe and Thomson, 1992:664 - my emphasis). These two levels take account of the fact that women are not always able to bring together intentions with their control of situations in practice. Intellectual empowerment, in which women are aware of men's power, and by which they might make powerful intentions to change their behaviour, might not be achieved in practice. This understanding of empowerment also takes account of a transitory level in which women's power is contextual, for example occurring in some relationships but not others.

This conceptualisation of autonomy and empowerment implies that a critical concept of authenticity should incorporate reflexivity. A defence of authencity as an ideal in politics and ethics is unhelpful if it does not recognise the ways in which our self-understandings and values are shaped through pre-existing narratives and power relations. The WRAP authors suggest that one way in which women might experience empowerment in their sexual relationships with men is by defining their own sexual needs and negotiating these through a conscious *embodiment of feminine sexuality*. This entails women bringing the '*social* shaping of their material bodies into *consciousness*' (Holland, Ramazanoglu, Sharpe and Thomson, 1994b:22 - my emphasis). This is difficult to achieve and most young women in the WRAP study were disembodied 'in the sense of being detached from their sensuality and alienated from their material bodies' (Holland, Ramazanoglu, Scott and Thomson, 1994:68).[24] While women have a particular kind of knowledge about their bodies (in which they live up to idealised images of femininity) this actually gives them *less* control than men in sexual encounters because they lose touch with their own desires, or their desires are constructed wholly around pleasing men.

> Knowledge and experience of sexual pleasure can connect a woman with her body in ways which challenge disembodied femininity and so make her assertion of a need for safer sex more practicable. But where women's self-esteem, self-image, self-knowledge and emotional needs are tied to a highly skilled but limited social construction of femininity, then women will continue to support men's power and

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24. An example of this is when women have to ensure that they manage their appearance so that they appear 'acceptably attractive' but not 'overly sexual' (Holland, Ramazanoglu, Scott and Thomson, 1994:69).

their own subordination (Holland, Ramazanoglu, Scott and Thomson, 1994:76).
It is possible that when women talk about sex and about their own desires they could threaten
the constructed, disembodied sexuality. But in revealing sexual knowledge and expressing
sexual desires a girl's reputation may be threatened (Holland, Ramazanoglu, Sharpe and
Thomson, 1994b:24).   The search for sexual empowerment and autonomy is therefore
precarious.

A further element of women's empowerment, that strengthens the WRAP argument, is an
understanding of identity as constructed through narrative.   Benhabib makes a useful
connection between her definition of sexual autonomy and the role of narrative in the
construction of identity. She argues that the self's identity is 'constituted by a tale' which
is always in process, never complete.   The events of the past are 'reformulated and
renarrated in the light of the present and in anticipation of a future', moreover these play a
vital part in the telling of stories - 'the self's identity is revealed only in such a community
of interaction; who we are is how we reveal ourselves to others and to ourselves in such
processes' (Benhabib, 1986:349). This attention to the question of the narrative element of
identity brings authenticity to the heart of personal autonomy.   In practice then the
connection between authenticity and autonomy is one that is articulated through personal
narratives in which the self is not only 'the *subject* but also the *author* of a coherent life-
story' (Benhabib, 1992:198 - my emphasis).

Gay research at the level of the lived experience of sex has focused less on issues of
'empowerment' than on the different strategies that are used by gay men in their negotiation
of sexual risk and pleasure. This can be explained in relation to a general difference
between gay and feminist approaches to the question of sexual power and freedom. For
feminists, patriarchal power in women's heterosexual relationships is located in an intimate
other; that is an 'other' who is also the object of desire and love. Under such conditions the
question of empowerment is clearly central to women's safety and sexual freedom. For gay
theorists on the other hand, power is typically located in a non-intimate other, in what is

variously understood as heteronormativity, homophobia or heterosexism.[25] Oppression is the denial of the gay *self*, therefore the gay safe sex project involves debates about how best to understand the gay 'identities' that are the subject of safe sex practice. Alongside these debates about the diversity of gay men who are at risk of HIV infection, a rather different *educational strategy* has developed in which the main message is a universal one, that all men should avoid unprotected anal sex in all their relationships. This 'universal strategy' assumes that the only really safe sex strategy is one in which unprotected anal intercourse is never practised, even between two men of known HIV-negative status.

There is a distinction between this educational strategy and the discovery, through empirical research, of other strategies developed in gay sexual practice for avoiding HIV infection. For example the SAPA authors discovered four strategies that were adopted by different men.

A   changes to sexual practice: condom use, avoidance of anal penetrative sex, and the adoption of safe forms of sexual expression;

B   changes in nature/type of sexual relationships: reduction in the number of casual partners, reliance on 'regular' partner/s or monogamy;

C   negotiated safety: reliance on partner's sexual and drug use history, reliance on concordance of negative HIV antibody status;

D   avoidance: avoidance of certain sorts of partners, selection of 'clean' partners (Kippax, Connell, Dowsett and Crawford, 1993:157-158).

In particular, one consistent pattern has been identified through a range of research in Western countries in which there is a:

> separation between sexual practices with regular (or primary) partners and with casual partners or clients. With the latter, extremely consistent and extensive safe sex is occuring if and when support, information and condoms are available. However the incidence of unprotected sex, with many regular or primary relationships has been consistently higher (Dowsett, 1993:S258).

A strategy of having unprotected anal sex in contexts where the participants are certain that each partner is of sero-concordant status has come to be called negotiated safety (Kippax,

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25.   This is not to suggest that gay theorists have no concern with questions of interpersonal power relations between gay men. For example Ridge (1996:100), recognising that 'the issue of power relations between gay men has received little attention', attempts to correct this in his study of 'Sexual and Social Pathways and HIV'. However, such concerns are not at the centre of the theorisation of gay identity and sexual freedom.

Crawford, Davis, Rodden and Dowsett, 1993).[26] The identification of this pattern has led some commentators to argue that education and safe sex promotion should therefore accept and encourage, where appropriate, strategies that do not rely on a universal set of HIV risk avoidance practices.

> Repeatedly advising homosexually-active men to "always use condoms", when many of them have made an informed choice to do otherwise, may be akin to telling a drug-using population to "just say no". For some men negotiated safety may provide a strategy that is more sustainable, thus safer, than attempting to use condoms every time within a long-term relationship (Kippax, 1996:97).

Objections to this approach centre around arguments that unprotected anal sex may be not so much *negotiated* in sexual relationships as shaped through processes of 'impaired' communication, power relations and problematic hegemonic meanings that are attached to anal sex (Ridge, 1996). From this position negotiated safety is seen as an unsafe strategy for HIV risk reduction. This argument has some merit, taking seriously as it does the lived, contextual and profoundly intimate nature of sexual negotiations. It is also rightly cautious of over-emphasising the rational nature of sexual decision-making. However it is also possible to turn the recognition of the social and narrative construction of sexual meaning and practice in another direction where considerations of authenticity and autonomy are taken seriously.

I would argue that a universal strategy focuses on HIV risk and a desire for absolute safety in a way that disregards men's desires to express 'authentic' aspects of the self through sexual practice. In this respect it is a procedural form of rationality rather than a substantive one, focusing as it does on what is 'right' do in terms of techniques, rather than what it is 'good' be. As I have argued earlier in this chapter I believe that substantive forms of rationality and morality are better because they take seriously the background of significance against which moral and social action develops. A similar argument comes from Parnell's engagement with debates about HIV in developing countries:

> Within a newly developing paradigm of "sustainable human development", it is now acknowledged that development is non-sustainable unless it is undertaken

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26.   It should be noted that there is some debate about whether negotiated safety accounts for most of the occurence of unprotected anal intercourse in regular relationships. For example McLean, Boulton, Brookes et al (1994) found only a third of men in their study explained unprotected anal intercourse in their regular relationship on the basis of both partners assumed HIV-negative status (moreover only about half of this number actually knew their partner's HIV status).

voluntarily and collectively, and that this occurs only when processes enable people to respond in ways they choose to the problems they perceive as relevant (Parnell, 1996:105).

Such an approach should not be read as ignoring the ways in which gay men's needs and motives may be formulated through 'sedimented and frozen images of the good and happiness' (Benhabib, 1986:333). As Benhabib's definition of ego autonomy suggests individuals must be able to reflexively question 'the interpretive framework fixed by cultural tradition' (ibid).

To conclude, this chapter has outlined an argument in favour of situating safe sex within a project of sexual freedom. This project incorporates different understandings of the subject of freedom as well as of the values to which sexual freedom should refer. I have briefly outlined the key debates within gay and feminist scholarship on these questions. However it is clear that such positions draw on political and ethical traditions which precede the AIDS crisis. In order to evaluate various claims about 'safe sexual freedom' (as gay, and/or feminist), it is necessary to interrogate more closely the visions of sexual freedom which have shaped safe sex discourses. In chapters Two, Three and Four I examine in detail the various ways that sexual freedom has been theorised in a range of radical social theories.

CHAPTER TWO

SEXUAL LIBERATION AND ITS DISCONTENTS

In this chapter I examine the work of Reich and Foucault as two important narratives on sexual liberation. At first glance the inclusion of Foucault alongside Reich appears odd. Reich's accounts of sexual liberation can be situated within a sexual modernism that emphasised the progressive betterment of humankind through collective struggles. He accepted the Marxist model of a society divided and a psychoanalytic approach that predisposed him to see the individual as a self with hidden depths, natural needs and instincts, that could be repressed through the working of power. Foucault's project on the other hand is not *of* sexual liberation but in reaction *against* it. Foucault developed a version of 'sexual postmodernism'[1] that rejects a liberationist discourse in favour of a politics of the transgression of the limits that are imposed through discourses of sexuality. For Foucault, the liberationist discourse had not delivered what had been promised. He had been disappointed by the student revolts of May 1968 and was generally distrustful of the kind of enthusiasm expressed by such slogans as: 'Beneath the cobblestones - the beach!'. In the world of sexuality there was no pure 'sex' under the human imposition of discourses of sexuality. However, while Foucault disavows the repressive hypothesis that informs Reich's account, Foucault creates his own narrative account of a power constructing 'sexuality' and disciplining bodies, and of an ethics (of the self) that through practices of *freedom* provides a better model for the organisation of the sexual than that involved in the 'deployment of sexuality'. In this respect Foucault, while discontented with modernist notions of sexual freedom, is still interested in exploring the modes by which individuals might pursue sexual pleasures.

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1.   Foucault did not call himself a postmodernist and it is probably more accurate to call him an anti-modernist, but his theoretical view of sexuality has certainly been enthusiastically embraced by many of those who would use the label postmodern of themselves.

These views of sexual liberation can be examined in relation to two main theoretical domains. Firstly, each theorist develops a particular understanding of what sex 'is' and of the power that 'represses' or 'produces' that sex.   This set of theoretical concerns is typically constructed as a debate between an 'essentialist' and a 'social constructionist' view of the relationship between 'sex' and 'society'.   There is now a large body of literature that interrogates this set of concerns.   Rather than summarise this larger debate I will draw selectively from it and develop those alternative constructions that I believe most adequately address my concerns.   Secondly, discourses on sexual liberation involve ethical considerations of how best to live a sexual life that is in some way 'fulfilling'.   Each theorist's view of wherein sexual autonomy might lie, will be explored.   Before I examine these two theoretical domains, I will briefly outline how narrative has been mobilised in theories of sexual liberation.   Lyotard's rejection of 'master narratives' is now familiar and has been influential in contemporary writing on AIDS and sexual freedom.   Nevertheless I contend that such a view endorses a problematic understanding of difference and pluralism, and it will be critiqued in favour of the notion of 'conceptual narrativity'.

The Role of Narrative in Theories of Sexual Liberation

Master Narratives, Difference and Pluralism: The Aporias of the Postmodern Critique

> The grand narrative has lost its credibility, regardless of what mode of unification it uses, regardless of whether it is a speculative narrative or a narrative of emancipation (Lyotard, 1984:37).

The theoretical and political project of sexual liberation is a recent addition to the emancipatory struggles of class, ethnicity and gender. It can be located within the emerging tradition of 'sexual modernism' that developed in the early part of the twentieth century (Pringle, 1992). This tradition, with its rejection of 'Victorian' values, included sexology, utopian socialism and feminism, and 'perceived itself as progressive in that it regarded sexual experience in positive terms, encouraged the expression of female sexuality and defended the rights of homosexuals and other sexual minorities' (Pringle, 1992:77). The history of 'sexual modernism' developed by Freudo-Marxist theorists such as Reich, Marcuse, Fromm, and Roheim is one of a slowly unfurling progress away from Victorian prudery towards an enlightened emancipation in which people have come to experience a 'freer', less inhibited

expression of sexual desires and pleasures. This story has become a familiar one, oft-repeated in the popular media. It is a history that falls well within the Enlightenment plot-line that supposes that the 'pre-given purpose of history is the progressive perfection of humans and the ever more complete realisation of their capabilities and projects' (Flax, 1990:31). It also assumes that events are not random, but are connected by an underlying and 'rational structure comprehensible by reason' (Flax, 1990:31). According to contemporary social theorists of various sorts (e.g. feminists, critical theorists, and postmodernists), this plot-line is fundamentally flawed. From the postmodern perspective, the creation of 'master narratives' of History supports a notion of Progress that in turn 'depends on the idea that there is some pre-given goal toward which Man is steadily moving' (Flax, 1990:33). It is claimed that this is a fiction created in order that Man can 'find or justify a place for himself within time' (ibid). As such it is part of Man's attempt to control the world and gain sovereignty within it.

An influential critique of 'master narratives' is found in Lyotard's book *The Postmodern Condition* (1984). He rejects what he sees as the totalising nature of modern social theories and the revolutionary politics that is the legacy of Enlightenment thought. Furthermore, Lyotard contends that modernist social theorising and politics take on the form of 'master narratives' that assume their own truth claims. The metanarratives of Marxism, science and so on are said to have lost all credibility because they are blind to their own subjective, relativist and interpretive positions. While claiming to speak the truth in an objective manner, modernist theories assume a narrator's voice, that whilst hidden is always actually present and necessarily partial. Lyotard uses the term modern 'to designate any science that legitimates itself with reference to a metadiscourse of this kind making an explicit appeal to some grand narrative such as the dialectic of Spirit, the hermeneutics of meaning, the emancipation of the rational or working subject, or the creation of wealth' (Lyotard, 1984:xxiii) and, one could add, the emancipation of individuals from sexual repression.

> narratives ... thus define what has the right to be said and done in the culture in question, and since they are themselves a part of that culture, they are legitimated by the simple fact that they do what they do (Lyotard, 1984:23).

For Lyotard it follows then that the question of the *legitimation* of different 'language games' is irrelevant. Legitimation arises from within the 'linguistic practice and communicational

interaction' of the language games people play (Lyotard, 1984:41). This leads Lyotard to accept as necessary a 'polytheism of values' and to reject consensus as a mode of politics. In place of the grand narratives of modernity, Lyotard proposes that analysis should be concerned with localised 'little narratives' that recognise their own partiality. These little narratives are seen to take part in language games where consensus is impossible, except in an extremely circumscribed localised context, and they are always 'subject to eventual cancellation' (Lyotard, 1984:66). Benhabib (1990) makes the point that this approach does not allow any distinction to be made between 'manipulative and non-manipulative uses of speech. The consequence of this position is that not truth alone, but all claims to validity are at best pious wishes, at worst illusions fabricated to deceive' (Benhabib, 1990:116).

Lyotard's arguments have found a resonance in a range of postmodernist positions including those in the area of AIDS commentary. For example, Cindy Patton argues in relation to questions of safe sex that 'we will never find - should not even seek - a unified political language, but we can learn to operate in a range of mutually untranslatable, intrinsically differently motivated [sexual] vernaculars' (Patton, 1996:154). Such a position raises two related problems. Firstly, this approach to the question of different political, theoretical and ethical positions ironically 'absolutises' and 'universalises' difference and neglects to recognise the ways in which *commonality* may be significant in human life. Secondly, it does not solve the problem of how competing theories or practices of sexual freedom might be dealt with in practice. A plurality of forms of sexual practice does not necessarily lead to the endorsement of a pluralistic acceptance of all moral and political positions. The justification of different theoretical and political positions is one that cannot be avoided.

There is no doubt that questions of difference and plurality are essential to understanding contemporary social relations and in making claims about sexual freeeom. Early theories of sexual liberation were premised on a common sexual drive that was present within all humans. In Reich's theory for example, sexual diversity was flattened out so that heterosexual intercourse was the only sexual act recognised as being capable of expressing true human sexuality and morality. Feminists and gay theorists have been rightly concerned to critique the lacunae of such a position. Difference is a fundamental aspect of social life

and results from the fact that individuals may be 'non-equivalent' in terms of gender, ethnicity, sexuality, religion and so on. A problem of many social theories, however, is that they speak in universal terms - they treat all people as if they share the same characteristics. Such theories are *substitutionalist,* that is 'the universalism they defend is defined surreptiously by identifying the experiences of a specific group of subjects as the paradigmatic case of all humans' (Benhabib, 1986:158). For example, feminist theory has aptly described the ways that much theoretical discourse about 'humans' is actually based on the experience of men. Women's experiences are marginalised and devalued and theoretical concepts are constructed around a partial view of the world. This form of universalism is clearly unacceptable.

However the recognition of sexual difference and diversity does not necessarily lead to the kind of position advanced by Lyotard or Patton. As Calhoun suggests, plurality may well be basic to the human condition but distinctions are 'dependent on some background of common recognition' (Calhoun, 1995:193). This background of recognition may in fact call for some other kind of 'universalism' that *enables* rather than constrains understanding and explanation. For example, Benhabib makes an argument for an *'interactive* universalism':

> that acknowledges the plurality of modes of being human, and differences among humans, without endorsing all these pluralities and differences as morally and politically valid. [...] In this sense "universality" is a regulative ideal that does not deny our embodied and embedded identity, but aims at developing moral attitudes and encouraging political transformations that can yield a point of view acceptable to all. Universality is not the ideal consensus of fictiously defined selves, but the concrete process, in politics and morals, of the struggle of concrete, embodied selves, striving for autonomy (Benhabib, 1986:158-9).

Dealing with difference does not have to entail Patton's solution of 'living with' mutually untranslatable vernaculars (Patton, 1996:154). This is hardly a solution and differs little from a liberal plea for tolerance. It fails to take account of the ways in which sexual difference is often tied to inequality and disadvantage. Sustaining 'the integrity of difference' does not provide an adequate response to calls for social justice (Johnson, 1994:130). Patton would doubtless strenuously deny this characterisation of the implications of her position. Her writing is clearly positioned in terms of a radical political posture that rejects the disadvantages associated with heteronormative power. However, my argument is that

Patton's commitment to a critique of sexual power is undercut when difference is absolutised as the preeminent social value worth defending.

While 'translation' is not a suitable metaphor for the way in which differences should be handled in political and everyday life, this does not exhaust the range of possible responses. For example, Calhoun suggests that understanding across differences might be reached through a 'mutual engagement with practice in the world' (Calhoun, 1995:292). This is not a purely cognitive or communicative practice that seeks translation or consensus formation.

> The possibilities for changing the world and the potential for mutual understanding across lines of difference are always present in our internal dialogicality and the dependence of our self-constitution on our relations with others; they are always possibilities for self-transformation as well (Calhoun, 1995:292).

Indeed Calhoun is suggesting a form of hermeneutics in which adequate understanding is only possible where there is a 'fusion of horizons' and all parties to disagreement must make some change, even in their *selves*, in order to move forward. To speak of sexual difference, as Patton does ('mutually untranslatable, intrinsically differently motivated vernaculars'), assumes that no understanding is possible between different others and that one should not attempt to make critical judgements across differences. In fact this latter position is not one that Patton can tolerate, since to do so would involve accepting heteronormativity alongside the various sexual vernaculars she seeks to defend.

Patton's disdain for any universalising values that might serve as the basis of an emancipatory politics, and her view of the subject as constituted *as* 'difference', highlights the theoretical aporias of anti-humanism. If Patton were asked to account for the motivations of her position, to justify why marginalised sexual vernaculars should have their day in the sun, she would be hard pressed to do so without recourse 'to a principled commitment to the cultural ideals of modern humanism' (Johnson, 1994:20). For why should diverse sexual vernaculars not gain cultural space except by virtue of their possessing some universal 'human' features that require protection? The problem with anti-humanism is not so much its critique of the metaphysical underpinnings of humanism, but that it does not recognise that a form of 'radical humanism' is possible in which the core values of humanism can be seen as not necessarily resting on a fixed metaphysical or anthropological foundation. Such a critical

redevelopment of humanism works from the assumption that a post-metaphysical conception of humanism is worth defending (see for example Benhabib, 1992; Johnson, 1994; Heller and Feher, 1988; Soper, 1990a; Bernstein, 1992). Pauline Johnson (1994:xi) suggests that radical humanism is critical of 'the totalitarian ambitions of a particular, privileged subjectivity committed to the universalisation of its own will and interests' but that it also asserts more positively that:

> the humanist ideas of freedom, equality and authentic self-realisation are not merely the rhetoric of a disciplinary regime; these values, which have taken shape in the course of historical development, must also be affirmed as modernity's crowning, if fragile, achievement (Johnson, 1994:xii).

Conceptual Narrativity in Theories 'of' and 'against' Sexual Liberation

In the previous section I took issue with that aspect of the postmodernist critique of master narratives which suggests that pluralism solves the problem of different claims to truth. However, the question still remains about whether narrative of some kind might be useful in the process of theorising. Douglas Kellner for example argues that Lyotard does not differentiate sufficiently between:

> "master narratives" that attempt to subsume every particular, every specific viewpoint, and every key point into one totalising theory (as in some versions of Marxism, feminism, Weber etc) from "grand narratives" which attempt to tell a Big Story, such as the rise of capital, patriarchy or the colonial subject (Kellner, 1988:253).

Kellner goes on to distinguish between metanarratives about the foundation of knowledge and macro social theory about complex social phenomena; and between synchronic and diachronic narratives. He argues that Lyotard, by lumping all grand narratives together, 'does violence to the diversity of theoretical narratives in our culture' (Kellner, 1988:253). Moreover Kellner wants recognition that a narrative component is indispensable in social theory (Kellner, 1988:255). While Kellner does not do that work himself, the sociologist Margaret Somers[2] has developed a theoretical approach which takes narrativity to the very heart of social theory.

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2   Somers first developed this approach in relation to her studies of the formation of the English working class. See Somers (1986, 1994) and Somers and Gibson (1994).

Like Lyotard, Margaret Somers is critical of meta- and master narratives, but not for the reason that Lyotard proposes. In a thorough overview of the role that narrative can play in theoretical discourse, Somers and Gibson recognise that theoretical concepts come to be 'encoded' through master narratives of progress, decadence, enlightenment and so on. These narratives 'usually operate at a presuppositional level of social science epistemology or beyond our awareness' (Somers and Gibson, 1994:63). However, what is paradoxical about these metanarratives is that they are actually characterised by 'denarrativization'.

> That is, they are built on concepts and explanatory schemes ("social systems", "social entities", "social forces") that are in themselves abstractions. Although metanarratives have all the necessary components of narrativity - transformations, major plot lines and causal emplotment, characters and action - they nonetheless miss the crucial element of a *conceptual narrativity* (Somers and Gibson, 1994:63 - my emphasis).

Somers and Gibson produce an interesting critique of how the sociological understanding of social action and agency 'became theoretically embedded in the historical fiction of the individuating social actor, whose natural state was moving towards freedom from the past and separation from symbolic association, "tradition" and above all, the constraint of "others"' (Somers and Gibson, 1994:49). A paradigm of sexual modernism clearly shares some of the traits of classical modernisation theory that Somers and Gibson describe here. Sexual modernism assumes that sexuality is some kind of 'thing' possessed by individuals who are prevented from expressing it by repressive sexual norms and dominating others. From this view, sexual freedom would consist of the individual's *separation* from repressive norms. The deficiency of such a model of social action is that it lacks 'conceptual narrativity'. Conceptual narrativity necessitates 'a social analytical vocabulary that can accommodate the contention that social life, social organizations, social action, and social identities are narratively, that is, temporally and relationally constructed through both ontological and public narratives' (Somers and Gibson, 1994:63). For humans there can be *no* separation from these narratives that surround us. They both enable and constrain us, but freedom cannot lie in a search for autonomous existence apart from *some* narratives. A social theory of freedom must recognise the constitutive role that narratives play at both the ontological and public levels.

Somers and Gibson defend their po ition by arguing that narrativity is an *ontological* condition of human life and as such it demands that theoretical concepts should be able to capture 'the narrativity through which *agency* is negotiated, *identities* are constructed, and *social action* mediated' (Somers and Gibson, 1994:64 - my emphasis). Having said that, however, not all theoretical accounts approach the level of *conceptual* narrativity that provide the most analytically adequate explanations. Somers argues that theoretical accounts must include an understanding of *self* as 'narrative identity' and of *society* as 'relational setting' (Somers, 1994:620). In brief, this understanding involves recognising that the self is constructed in a context of internal and external relations of time, place and power. From this perspective social action is, therefore, only intelligible 'if we recognise that people are guided to act by the structural and cultural relationships in which they are embedded and by the *stories* through which they constitute their identities' (Somers, 1994:624). These narrative identities of individuals need to be located in the temporal and spatial relationships (of markets, institutions, organisations and practices etc) that they are located in. Therefore conceptual narrativity also incorporates the idea that a *relational* imagery of the social order is more appropriate than a *totalising* one.

> A social order is neither a naturalistic system nor a plurality of individuals, but rather a complex of contingent cultural and institutional relationships. [...] A relational setting is a pattern of relationships among institutions, public narratives, and social practices. As such it is a relational matrix, a social network (Somers, 1994:626).

These considerations about conceptual narrativity will be used to help reach a critical understanding of the value or otherwise of theories for, and against, sexual liberation. In the following two sections I will examine how Reich and Foucault explain the 'object' of sexual liberation, i.e. the thing to be liberated/expressed (e.g. orgasmic potency and bodies/pleasures) as well as the the self and mode of ethical relations that should organise sexual expression.

Sexuality: Natural or Discursive?

To make an argument for or against sexual liberation requires that some attention should be paid to *what* is to be liberated. For both Reich and Foucault, there is a concern to explain what sex 'is' and the kind of selves that are sexually active and that should be 'liberated'. The 'nature' of these sexual selves and bodies has been the subject of a great deal of

contemporary social theory on sexuality. It is commonly argued that Reich employs a 'naturalistic' model of sexuality in which there is a core of sexual energy that is repressed and distorted by various mechanisms of domination. On the other hand, social constructionist views, influenced by Foucault, see nothing natural in sex and they develop a model of 'sexuality' as discursive. This typification of the theorists as either essentialist or constructionist, while accurate to some degree, misses the extent to which Reich moves towards a social constructionist view with his concept of character, while Foucault, seemingly the social constructionist par excellence, actually retains a residual naturalism in his work when he refers to his vague, and presumably non-produced, 'bodies and pleasures' (Keat, 1986). Keat's argument suggests that it may be impossible for theorists to avoid the mutually constitutive nature of what have been seen as the opposites of 'sex' and 'society'. It is my contention that neither Reich nor Foucault can adequately account for the lived reality of bodies, in sex, that are simultaneously cultural, political, gendered, and somatic. As a contrast to both the naturalistic and discursive models of sex, I briefly outline Bob Connell's notion of *body-reflexive practice* as one way that more adequately captures the agency, dynamism, sociality and somatic realities of bodies. When this concept of body-reflexive practice is joined by an understanding of the self as possessing a narrative identity, and that both self and sexual practice occurs in the context of sexual social relations, it becomes possible to move beyond some of the dead ends that the essentialism/constructionism debate has produced.

Reich: Orgasmic Energy, Sexual Repression and Character Structure

Reich's story of the sexual self that is in need of liberation, is clearly a meta-narrative of some kind. Reich points to the repressive character of the patriarchal family that created the authoritarian, neurotic and submissive personality types, who were unable to experience sexual satisfaction. The production of these authoritarian or submissive personalities served the purposes of capitalism and contributed to the lack of revolutionary fervour among the masses. This version of sexual repression utilises a *totalising* picture of society as a sex-economic structure, and accepts that the basic core of sexuality is a natural 'orgasmic energy'. Such a version of the relationship between sex and society undeniably relies on a naturalistic model of sex. Sex and society are seen as two different realms. Society could

allow expression of sex, or deny it. Through the process of repression, society shapes and distorts sexual energy into character structures. In this section, I will develop a critique of Reich's naturalistic perspective as insufficiently social and shaped through his normative views of what are the most appropriate forms of sexual expression.

Reich believed that human existence was determined by an amalgam of 'instinctual *and* socio-economic processes' (Reich, 1972:xxiii - emphasis in original). Reich's analysis of society was a form of Freudo-Marxism and he argued that it was born 'from the effort to harmonize Freud's depth psychology with Marx's economic theory' (Reich, 1972:xxiii). He developed the concept of the sex-economic structure as an attempt to synthesise Freudianism and Marxism into a new theoretical model of society.[3] The key institutional site of sexual repression within this structure was the patriarchal authoritarian family. Reich argued that the family was 'the factory in which the state's structure and ideology are molded' (Reich, 1972:30). The family inhibited the child's 'natural sexuality' so that there 'is a severe impairment of the child's *genital* sexuality, [which] makes the child afraid, shy, fearful of authority, obedient, "good", and "docile" in the authoritarian senses of the words' (ibid). This view of the sexual realm as ordered through the workings of the patriarchal family is clearly a totalising view of the social relations of sexuality. It neglects to examine the complex interrelationships between family structures and religious, class and cultural differences. It also fails to account for those individuals, presumably including Reich himself, who were able to resist the repression of the patriarchal family.

Reich contrasted a view of society as a structured sex-economy, with the notion of a natural 'orgasmic energy'. Reich called this underlying sexual essence orgone.[4] Cosmic orgone energy was believed to be a quasi-electrical force that was the driving force of sexuality, which if disturbed could cause anything from impotence to cancer. This aspect of Reich's

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3.   It is commonly agreed that Reich's work on this project was not particularly coherent. There are many inconsistencies and contradictions in his work and his attempted synthesis of Marx and Freud really amounted to little more that 'a crude hyphenation of Communism and psychoanalysis' (Robinson, 1969:40).

4.   Reich claimed he discovered orgone through a series of biological experiments that were designed to measure the increase in bio-electrical charges in sexual organs during arousal (Robinson, 1969:63).

work is clearly predicated upon a naturalistic assumption - i.e. that 'a streaming of biological energy' underlies social inhibitions (Reich, 1973:29). Reich believed that the expression of this energy through orgasm provided the means by which individuals might experience happiness and freedom. A balanced sex-economy, the desirable state of human affairs, depended upon the *appropriate* expression of the orgasm. Orgasm was the goal of sexual activity, it was the sign of sexual health, and it allowed the development of a personality type (or what Reich called a character structure) that was 'free' and self-regulating. Indeed Reich believed that humans would inevitably fall ill (in body or mind) if they failed to achieve satisfactory sexual release through orgasm. Undischarged libido had to go somewhere and if it were not released through orgasm it would be channeled into the formation of psychic or physical symptoms (Reich, 1973:37). Therefore in order for individuals to experience sexual health they had to establish orgastic potency. This potency entailed:

> the capacity to surrender to the streaming of biological energy, free of any inhibition; the capacity to discharge completely the dammed-up sexual excitation through involuntary, pleasurable convulsions of the body (Reich, 1973:29).

The discussion to this point has focused upon Reich's naturalistic view of the sexual realm. But, as mentioned earlier, it is possible to interpret his writings on character and character-analysis as a version of the social construction of the sexual body and self (Keat, 1986:24). Reich argued that the process of sexual repression within the family led to the construction of personality structures that he called 'character'. For Reich these character structures were the antithesis of the orgasm. They acted as an 'armouring' that the individual created to protect the self from strong emotions and reality. The more fully-developed people's character, the less able they would be to act spontaneously. Therefore, character developed at the expense of the orgasm and it consumed the psychic energy that should be, but was not, discharged in sexual intercourse (Robinson, 1969:25). The construction of character involved turning *psychic* anxieties and neuroses into *physical* manifestations on the body e.g. tics, patterns of speech, ways of standing and walking, and so on. The lived body, with its characteristic way of moving in the world, was therefore a product of power. Admittedly there remained a notion of the natural underneath character, but to a certain degree Reich did something with his analysis that Foucault argues was necessary, i.e. he saw the body as 'disciplined' and 'produced', if not by 'discourses of sexuality' then by the family and

compulsory sex-morality. There is still the language of character as *artificial*, that which is imposed over *the natural,* but this is also found in Foucault's appeal to 'bodies and pleasures' that exist outside of the deployment of sexuality.[5]

There is a tension therefore in Reich's work between a naturalistic view of sexual energy and a more constructivist view of the body. This 'constructionist' view of bodies and character structure does not in fact rely upon Reich's physicalist understandings of sexual energy. However, there is a contradiction between Reich's naturalism and social constructivism. This can be seen more clearly in a closer examination of Reich's explanation of 'disturbances in female orgastic potency'. Reich explains the difficulty that some women have in experiencing orgasm with reference to both the social sphere *and* a failure on the part of some women to recognise their true biological nature. On the first point he argues that there is a 'double sexual standard [which] obligates women to reject sexuality to a far greater extent than men' (Reich, 1980:31). On the second point Reich claims that where women reject the 'female sexual role' there is a tendency to be 'vaginally anesthetic and [to] masturbate clitorally' (Reich, 1980:57). Women who display these last two 'symptoms' are said to be suffering from masculinity desires that contradict their *biological* female characteristics. Reich argued that this contradiction cannot help but lead to guilt feelings that inhibit appropriate 'orgastic potency' (ibid). Cure for women comes through shifting libidinal interest from the clitoris to the vagina and this occurs through identification with the mother-role in which:

> the clitoris becomes more or less uninteresting psychically. This does not entail a loss of physiological excitability; on the contrary, the clitoris now has an important role in foreplay and coitus. However, interest in the excitation of this organ decreases as soon as the new pleasure source, *the vagina*, has been discovered, because the latter can now satisfy all libidinal demands, *corresponds to the biological sexual role*, and, in contrast to clitoral eroticism, creates no psychic conflicts (Reich, 1980:167).

This equation of female sexual pleasure (located in vaginal intercourse) with 'the biological sexual role' (i.e. ability to bear children) is oddly in contradiction with claims that Reich made elsewhere that women were oppressed through their role as mothers and economic dependence on their husbands. Reich argued that the patriarchal family denied women sexual

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5.   Therefore it is possible to see that what appears to be a decisive constructionism in Foucault, can on closer inspection be seen to involve 'a residual (quasi-biological) "naturalism" about human bodies' (Keat, 1986:24).

expression and reinforced their position as childbearer through the 'idealization and deification of motherhood' (Reich, 1972:105). This inconsistency illustrates that there is clearly a normative element that overrides what Reich liked to represent as his purely biological, and therefore objective, view of orgasm.

Reich's view of the orgasm as necessarily heterosexual, and genitally focused, with its focus on the vagina for women is presented as though it is the result of natural biological processes located in the body. However, this appeal to natural sexuality is based upon a set of normative assumptions about a form of masculine heterosexual gentitality. For Reich the 'true orgasm' had to be the result of heterosexual intercourse, 'without irrelevant fantasies, and of an appropriate duration' (Reich, 1942:79; cited in Robinson, 1969:17). Reich therefore believed that homosexuality, while being tolerated prior to the sexual revolution, was ultimately the result of the repression of heterosexual impulses during childhood and adolescence which would disappear once the conditions of sex-economic morality were achieved. (Reich, 1949:211) And for women, orgasm had to be the result of vaginal, not clitoral stimulation. Moreover Reich's concentration on 'genitality', lead him to proclaiming that foreplay was unnecessary and, in fact, deleterious. Reich believed that too much emphasis on foreplay would detract attention away from the genitals and therefore limit the possibilities of orgastic potency. Such a rendition of a sexual norm does considerable violence to the notion of difference in the sexual sphere (whether that is gender difference, sexual orientation or other non-penetrative sexual practices). Decades of feminist critique and gay theory have moved some way from Reich's problematic normative notions of what counts as appropriate sexual expression.

In summary it might be argued that, notwithstanding his ideas about character, Reich's account of the sex-society relation is inadequate, because it gives insufficient attention to the sociality of sex. In particular Reich's notion of orgasmic energy is decontextualised and it does not capture the interrelationships between the larger social realm, the interactions between individuals in particular social contexts or their narrative identities and biological processes. To see sex as, at its core, a natural energy is an inadequate theorisation. I argue that it is better to conceptualise sex as a form of social action. As such sex can only be

understood in all its complexity when the social and cultural relationships of which it is a part are connected to the ontological and public narratives that are constitutive of narrative identities. An alternative approach to Reich's naturalism is also suggested by Connell's (1995b:52-66) discussions of the mutually constitutive nature of the bodily and the social. Connell argues that the physical, embodied sense of being male and female (and I would argue 'being sexual') is interwoven with social processes. Using an example from a life-history, Connell gives a very different account of orgasmic sex than Reich would have managed. He quotes a man's memory of his first sexual experience and comments on how it demonstrates the complex interaction between the body and social processes.

> *The girl was an18-year-old Marouba beach chick. What the hell she wanted to have anything to do with me I don't know. She must have been slightly retarded, emotionally if not intellectually. I suppose she just went to it for the image, you know. I was already the long-haired surfie rat. I recall getting on top of her and not knowing where to put it and thinking, gee, it's a long way down ... and when I sort of finally got it in, it only went in a little way, and I thought this isn't much. Then she must have moved her leg a little way, and then it went further and I thought oh! gee, that's all right. And then I must have come in about five or six strokes, and I thought the feeling was outrageous because I thought I was going to die ... And then during that week I had a whole new sense of myself. I expected - I don't know what I expected, to start growing more pubic hair, or expected my dick to get bigger.[6]*

This is a tale of a familiar kind, recounting a sexual coming-of-age. In almost every detail it shows the intricate interplay of the body with social process. Choice and arousal, as Hugh reconstructs it, are *social* ("the beach chick", "the surfie rat"). The required performance is *physical*, "getting it in". The young Hugh lacks the knowledge or skill required. But his skill is improved *interactively*, by his partner's bodily response ("she must have moved her leg a little bit"). The *physical feeling* of climax is immediately an *interpretation* ("I thought I was going to die"). It triggers off a familiar *symbolic sequence* - death, rebirth, new growth. Conversely the *social transition* Hugh has accomplished, entering into sexual adulthood, immediately translates as bodily fantasy ("more pubic hair", "dick to get bigger") (Connell, 1995b:53 - my emphasis).

Connell does not discuss this example in relation to the concept of narrative identity but it is clearly relevant here. Hugh's story is an ontological narrative that draws on larger public narratives about different 'types' of women and the process of sexual development.

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6.   Italics in the original.

Foucault: 'Sexuality' vs Bodies/Pleasures

Whereas Reich is frequently castigated for an insufficiently social account of sexuality Foucault's work is cited as the sexual constructionist account par excellence. However, while Foucault raises important questions about sexual 'nature', his account ultimately leads to an anti-realist position that is as problematic as the essentialisms he critiques. In this section I will examine Foucault's account of sexuality as a 'fictional unity' in which the production of sexuality is achieved through the play of discourses. Against Reich's general (although contradictory) 'naturalism', Foucault develops a model of sexuality as anything but natural.

For Foucault that which has come to be called 'sexuality' - including identities, pleasures, practices, desires and relationships - is social all the way down. There is no underlying or basic sex, no instinct, no drive, no energy outside of the *discourses* of 'sexuality'. However, this characterisation of Foucault ignores the residual naturalism that remains when he talks about resisting the grip of power 'with the claims of bodies, pleasures, knowledges, in their multiplicity and their possibility of resistance. The rallying point for the counter attack against the deployment of sexuality ought not to be sex-desire, but *bodies and pleasures'* (Foucault, 1978:157). In this respect, Foucault advances a version of the 'repressive hypothesis' of his own. 'After all, he himself talks frequently of the "subjugation" of bodies, of the "controls" imposed upon them, of their being rendered "docile"; and also, of their (? "natural") capacities for "resistance" to such exercises of power over them' (Keat, 1986:31). The problem with Foucault's account is therefore two-fold. His constructionist and anti-realist position cannot account for the unmistakably material nature of bodies, and secondly where he looks to bodies/pleasures as a site of resistance to power/knowledge he reintroduces some kind of 'real' that is elsewhere disallowed in his accounts of the social.

Foucault's 'history of sexuality' and position on sexual liberation is opposed to the kind of 'total history' that he believed Reich produced. He saw in histories such as Reich's an attempt to search for the single centre that could explain all that surrounded and followed it. Foucault did not believe that this search for original foundations was productive and his genealogical approach was therefore opposed to the search for origins.

> The world we know is not tl is ultimately simple configuration where events are
> reduced to accentuate their essential trails, their final meaning, or their initial and final
> value. On the contrary, it is a profusion of entangled events (Foucault, 1984a:89).

Rather than looking to some kind of notion of a 'totalistic' society (whether capitalist or
patriarchal or some other kind), Foucault turns to discourses as the motor in creating
knowledge and producing power relations. *The History of Sexuality* was therefore, in part,
an attempt to refute what Foucault saw as the unacceptable repressive hypothesis that
dominated histories of sexuality, and that could be found most clearly in the work of Reich.
Whereas Reich identified power as *suppressing* the natural sexual instincts of individuals,
Foucault posited the *production* of sexuality through discourse. He argued that there is no
natural sexuality that power represses, but only the multiple forms of sexual practice,
identities and desires that are called into being through discourse. In this view, sexual
liberation of the Reichian kind is impossible, because there is nothing there - no essential core
- to liberate. Moreover, and to Foucault's mind more dangerously, discourses of liberation
produce their own power effects. Foucault argued that Reich's analysis was trapped:

> within the deployment of sexualty, and not outside or against it. The fact that so
> many things were able to change in the sexual behaviour of Western societies without
> any of the promises or political conditions predicted by Reich being realised is
> sufficient proof that this whole sexual "revolution", this whole "antirepressive"
> struggle, represented nothing more [...] than a tactical shift and reversal in the great
> *deployment of sexuality* (Foucault, 1978:131 - my emphasis).

Foucault does not deny the existence of sexual repression in terms of practices of prohibition
or censorship or denial (ibid:12). But he claims that it is a mistake to see this mode of power
as the primary and driving social force that has shaped the thing we have come to call
sexuality. His argument is that these practices exist alongside a much more important and
pervasive mechanism through which there is an increasing *incitement* to talk about and do
sex. Rather than there being a repressive form of power controlling the sexual domain, there
has been a 'discursive explosion' in which regulation occurs through a positive process. So,
in the following oft-quoted passage, Foucault defines sexuality thus:

> *Sexuality must not be thought of as a kind of natural given* which power tries to hold
> in check, or as an obscure domain which knowledge tries gradually to uncover. *It is
> the name that can be given to a historical construct*: not a furtive reality that is
> difficult to grasp, but a great surface network in which the stimulation of bodies, the
> intensification of pleasures, the incitement to discourse, the formation of special
> knowledges, the strengthening of controls and resistances, are linked to one another,

in accordance with a few major strategies of knowledge and power (Foucault, 1978:105-6 - my emphasis).

This way of conceptualising sexuality, challenges the notion that there is an underlying sexual essence that can be 'known' and 'controlled', or 'liberated'. Instead it asserts a domain of life that is created through the operation of discourses. 'Sexuality' therefore refers to a *fictional* unity. Discourses of 'sexuality' have produced our understanding of what sex 'is', of how it is thought to reside in certain organs, is endowed with instincts and leads to a separate life in the inner life of the individual.

Foucault's view of sexual liberation was uncompromising. In his view it was a chimera that was worse than the repression it opposed. He argued that the very discourse of sexual liberation led to a situation in which people were *more* controlled and *less* free than before the notion of liberation became so popular. Foucault's analysis of sexual liberation, was that it allowed a particularly pernicious form of power to be acted out through the bodies and selves of individuals. In *The History of Sexuality* Foucault explores what he calls the 'repressive hypothesis'. He has three doubts about the repressive hypthesis - the first is historical and concerns whether or not sexual repression is 'truly an established historical fact' (Foucault, 1978:10). Secondly, 'do the workings of power...really belong primarily to the category of repression' (ibid). And thirdly, and most importantly here, he asks 'did the *critical* discourse that addresses itself to repression [i.e. of sexual liberation] come to act as a roadblock to a power mechanism that had operated unchallenged up to that point, or *is it not in fact part of the same historical network as the thing it denounces (and doubtless misrepresents) by calling it "repression"'* (ibid - my emphasis).

Foucault argues that the deployment of sexuality in modern Western societies is organised around the notion that the 'truth' of ourselves is to be found in sex. The incitement to sex, which has latterly been seen as a means by which sexual *liberation* might be procured, works by linking the *truth* of the 'self' to the *confessions* of one's sexuality. Foucault argues that rather than being 'emancipatory' this is simply another (and more subtle) form of domination that *categorises* individuals, attaches them to their identities and *traps them* in forms of identification that are already linked to disciplinary mechanisms of power.

How is it that in a society like ours, sexuality is not simply a means of reproducing

the species, the family and the individual? Not simply a means to obtain pleasure and enjoyment? How has sexuality come to be considered the privileged place where our deepest "truth" is read and expressed? (Foucault, 1988b:110-111).

For Foucault, searching for the truth of our selves through sexuality is a historical fact, that ties us more thoroughly to mechanisms of subjection and subjectification. Through bio-power our bodies and sexualities are produced and affirmed in particular directions. In place of a *liberation* of sexuality which operates with an 'ontology of desire' and pursues anti-repressive struggles Foucault advocated 'the rallying point for the counterattack against the deployment of sexuality ought not to be sex-desire, but bodies and pleasures' (Foucault, 1978:157). And with this, Foucault ushers back into his theory some kind of natural, non-repressed core of sexuality.

Foucault's version of the social constructionist thesis has by now come under a great deal of sustained criticism from feminists and realists of various persuasions. Feminists are critical of Foucault's androcentricism,[7] and the realist critique focuses on the ultimately incoherent nature of his anti-realist account (Soper, 1995:131; see also Morrow, 1995). Foucault's androcentricism will be addressed more specifically in the following section on the ethics of liberation. Here I will draw out some aspects of the realist critique of Foucault that are useful in thinking about sex in relation to 'liberation'.

Kate Soper argues that ontological anti-realism (of which Foucault's account is surely one) is problematic, because it is unable to justify its critique of existing practices, and it cannot adequately defend as more emancipatory the alternatives it suggests to the workings of power (Soper, 1995:129-130).

> For if there are, indeed, no "natural" needs, desires, instincts, etc., then it is difficult to see how these could be said to be subject to the "repressions" or "distortions" of existing norms, or to be more fully or truly realised within any other order of sexuality. The prescriptive force of these critiques is thus systematically undermined by their insistence on the arbitrary and purely politically determined character of the divide between the supposed givens of nature and the impositions of culture. Their denunciations of the "merely" normative character of specific forms of sexual institution is, in other words, directly incompatible with their ontological anti-realism (Soper, 1995:130).

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7.   See for example McNay (1990), Soper (1993:39-47), Grimshaw (1993).

Soper's arguments about nature in general can be extended to sexual nature. She defends the recognition of nature in a realist sense as matter, as 'physicality', as those processes that are 'independent of human activity (in the sense that they are not a humanly created product)' (Soper, 1995:132). Soper makes a useful distinction between an understanding of nature as culturally 'processed' or 'transmuted' and the 'social construction' of human artefacts such as watches and telephones. It is a mistake to think of sexuality as socially constructed in the way that, for example, a watch is. Rather there are some undeniably somatic and bodily processes that are certainly 'culturally *processed*', but are not socially *constructed* in the sense that they did not exist prior to their discursive naming.

> there is an extra-discursive and biologically differentiated body upon which culture goes to work and inscribes its specific and mutable gender text [...] It is precisely this conception of the body as a natural organism that must inform the idea of its being "produced" (confined, disciplined, distorted ...) by discursive formations and social and sexual norms and powers (Soper, 1995:133, 134).

Moreover, Foucault's discursive construction of sexuality has not solved the Cartesian split between mind and body. Connell argues that such positions 'have made bodies the *objects* of symbolic practice and power but not *participants*' (Connell, 1995b:60 - my emphasis). Foucault's account of sexuality ignores the way in which the sexual body is a 'subject-object' that is lived and experienced subjectively. It is not just the 'objective product of cultural forces' but is also active in its 'self-making' (Soper, 1995:135). The body's existence is the precondition for any cultural work on it and it is never finally 'made'. The sexual body, unlike the watch, remains the object of cultural constraints and subjective remakings, and of involuntary biological processes of ageing, disease and so on. We have no choice but to experience sexual bodies as in some sense natural because they exist in 'some form prior to whatever form we impose on them' (Soper, 1995:137).

Rosemary Pringle (1992) makes a similar point in relation to the discursive approach to gender and suggests that the social constructionist account is ultimately untenable, because the bodies that are subjected to cultural inscription are not featureless and they do not stay still. This dynamic aspect is even more profoundly present in sexual activity. Bodies actually change in the process of sexual activity - male bodies ejaculate, the penis becomes hard in arousal, female vaginas lubricate, the clitoris enlarges. The body ages - after menopause

many women have difficulty becoming wet even when aroused, men may have difficulty sustaining an erection. Bodies are susceptible to all manner of diseases and infections, including HIV. In a very real sense then the body *erupts* into the social and is less docile than Foucault's account would suggest. Just as Reich is unable to account satisfactorily for the intertwined social and natural aspects of the body, so Foucault is by turns too culturally determinist (ignoring the eruptions of the body), and yet where the body is ushered in as a point of resistance to power he turns to some kind of non-repressed biology as saving sex from inappropriate discursive production.

The paucity of the social constructionist account can be seen when we examine more closely the political claims of the Foucauldian perspective. For Foucault did not intend that his ideas about sexuality should lead to a political quietism. On the contrary he believed that resistance to the norms and discourses of sexuality would be obtained through bodies/pleasures. However, if Foucault is to be taken at his word, we have to ask what kind of things these 'bodies/pleasures' are if they are not natural (because no such thing exists) and yet are able to escape discourse (even though Foucault is adamant elsewhere that no such non-discursive realm exists). Morrow has suggested that Foucault is involved in a form of 'ontological gerrymandering' in which he 'smuggles realist assumptions into his account in order to remain viable' (Morrow, 1995:21). Foucault's view of bodies/pleasures is presented by him as the 'real' bedrock of sexuality, as opposed to the 'arbitrary constructive work of those who proposed different accounts of sexuality' (Morrow, 1995:22). If Foucault wants to appeal to the natural resistive power of bodies/pleasures, then he has to face up to the realism that this implies; for how can we challenge custom and convention around sexuality without recourse to some kind of sexual nature:

> If we are disallowed any appeal to natural needs, instincts, pleasures and pains, we remove the objective grounds for challenging the authority of custom and convention, and must accept that it is only on the basis of personal preference (or prejudice) that we can contest the "necessity" of a practice such as clitoridectomy or footbinding, challenge the oppression of sexual minorities, or justify the condemnation of any form of sexual abuse or torture (Soper, 1995:138).

And one could add in relation to the politics of safe sex, that a radical critique of the 'just say no' campaigns of the moral right must rely for part of its normative force on an appeal to the notion that sexual pleasure 'really exists' as an aspect of human existence that is deserving

of expression.

Body-reflexive Practices and Narrative Identity in Sexual Social Relations

Theories of the body's "social construction" involve a three-part relation between society, the body and the self (Frank, 1996:53).

Neither Reich nor Foucault provide an adequate theorisation of the sexuality that is to be 'liberated' or 'resisted'. Their theoretical resolutions of the sex-society opposition (for Reich between 'orgasmic energy' and 'society', and for Foucault between 'bodies/pleasures' and 'discourses') does not adequately explain the relation that exists between 'sexual nature' and social relations. These two terms have to be brought into closer contact with each other, without losing touch with the realist understanding that there is some kind of knowable sexual nature that is subjected to *social constraint*, as well as being the subject of *individual pleasure* and *intimate, loving relationships*. Entering this debate about social constructionism is not just of academic interest. Indeed for those whose lives are touched by the spectre of HIV risk, debates about what 'sex' really is (natural or discursive) have a direct relevance. How is HIV risk to be assessed without some understanding of the biological vectors through which it is carried? Blood and semen (the two most dangerous bodily fluids for their ability to host the human immunodeficiency virus) have a real biological nature that can be known through science.[8] HIV risk reduction strategies are at least partly dependent on science producing knowledge of the biological components of HIV infection and disease as well as on individuals having an accurate understanding of which practices are most, and least, risky.

Arthur Frank, in the context of a discussion of illness and the body, rephrases the question of social construction thus: 'what is the linkage between the body, self-narratives about the body, and what is variously called emancipation?' (Frank, 1996:61-62). Through such a posing of the question, Frank (like a number of other theorists e.g. Connell, 1995b; Soper, 1995), suggests that whenever we wish to talk about things like illness, health and sexuality

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8.   Perhaps this knowledge is imperfect, incomplete and sometimes mediated through problematic ideological constructions, but surely it is helpful to know things such as that HIV is a relatively fragile virus.

we must attend to the intimate connections between the biological, the social and the political. I would like to suggest that a possible way out of the tangle of the essentialist/constructionist debate is to understand any meaningful sexual act, identity or relationship as being embedded in *structured sexual social relations*, that involve *body-reflexive practices* and are mediated through a self-consciousness characterised by *narrative identity* (Connell and Dowsett, 1992; Connell, 1995a, b; Somers and Gibson, 1994; Frank, 1996). Moreover, these three components help in situating sexuality in the context of an emancipatory politics. In the rest of this section I will take each of these three constitutive elements of sexuality and use them to briefly reflect on sex in an age of HIV risk.

Connell argues that sexuality should be understood as neither 'nature nor discourse, but as a sphere of social practices that constitute social relations' (Connell, 1995a:390). Social constructionist accounts have focused on the 'social frame' of sexuality, that is on how the social realm constitutes what we take to be sexuality. In doing so, such accounts leave an 'increasingly empty "frame"' (Connell and Dowsett, 1992:62) - any specific aspect of sexuality disappears into discourse, and it is difficult to identity the 'thing' that is being constructed.[9] The solution is not to revert back to some unproblematised essentialism or nativism but to build a theoretical approach that can 'find ways of understanding the imbrication of bodies and histories, giving full weight to bodily experience without treating the body as the container of an ahistorical essence of sexuality' (Connell and Dowsett, 1992:63-4). This new understanding involves looking at the:

> systematic relationships between the sexual relationships between people. That is to say, *there is a social structure in sexuality*. In this structure personal practice encounters organized limits and organized enablements [...] To name "sexual social relations" is not to imagine a separate sphere of life which one enters like walking through a door. It is to identify *a logic of practice, a course which social action may take in any of the settings in which practice does occur* (Connell, 1995a:387, 388 - my emphasis).

One of the most significant ways in which sexuality is structured, is through its ordering in relation to the gender of sexual object choice (Connell, 1995a:387). Heterosexuality is the

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9.   Ironically even Foucault can not sustain such a position for long and his account of Victorian sexuality has to revert to class as the structure responsible for the differential power of 'the deployment of sexuality' over individuals.

hegemonic patterning of sexual relations. As such it accords mental health and moral value to particular sexual choices, while denying these positive attributes to other choices. Moreover, the structuring of sex through hegemonic heterosexuality *enables* the practice of some groups, while at the same time *limiting* others. Hegemonic heterosexuality structures both the kinds of relations that should exist between men and women, as well as marginalising homosexual relationships. In relation to HIV risk in hetero-sex, such a structuring of sexuality is implicated in the patterned nature of risk assessment and risk reduction practices between men and women. These relations, involving gendered inequality and a coital imperative, structure safe sex between men and women. In particular, the coital imperative constructs safe sex, for most heterosexual men and women, as intercourse with a condom. Other forms of non-penetrative sexual practice are not accorded the same meaning in terms of the pleasures and intimacy they afford. An ideology of 'appropriate femininity' subtly pressures many women to 'construct their bodies as passive' and therefore 'although young women might find cunnilingus more pleasurable than vaginal penetration it could be difficult to get men to accept this as "proper sex"' (Holland, Ramazanoglu, Sharpe and Thomson, 1994b:23).

Drawing on Connell's notion of 'body-reflexive practices' I have already suggested that Reich's accounts of the body are insufficiently social and that Foucault's talk of the discursive construction of sexuality does not adequately account for the biological dimension of the sexual body. Connell does not believe that there is some half-way house between social and biological determinism or that it is possible to add one to the other in the hope of coming up with a more adequate explanation (Connell, 1995b:52). A new approach is called for and Connell suggests that the concept of body-reflexive practices overcomes some of these problems. Body-reflexive practices involve a *circuit* between 'meaningful bodies' and 'embodied meanings' (Connell, 1995b:64). These practices help constitute a world that has a bodily dimension but is not biologically determined. There is a physical presence in sex that is *interpreted* but this presence is not just a neutral medium - its *materiality* matters. Sex in the context of HIV calls attention to bodily fluids that have to be 'regulated' in some way. Safe sex is most certainly a social and self-conscious act. As such it is a bodily performance (Connell, 1995b:54) that must take account of biology while at the same time being situated

within particular social relations. Safe sex is both social and bodily, it involves both symbolic and kinetic processes.

An adequate model of safe sex requires that attention be paid to both of these aspects which are in turn mutually dependent. Safe sex is also a form of social action that is called into existence through the structured nature of sexual relations. It was suggested above that hegemonic heterosexuality provides the 'logic of practice' (Connell, 1995a:388) for safe sex between men and women. However, it should be recognised that the gendered and sexual identities and practice of individuals are *vulnerable* when performance cannot be sustained. For example consider the implications for some men of a situational impotence in the face of having to use a condom. Where masculine virility is tied to the bodily performance of sustaining an erection and ejaculating at the right time (neither too soon nor too late) many men believe that failure in this area reflects a failure on the part of their 'manhood'. In this respect it is possible to see that bodies are active in social processes. They are not just the passive material imprinted by culture, but through *body-reflexive practices* they share in social agency.

To illustrate the point, Connell discusses how Don, a heterosexual man, found a desire to be 'inserted into', that is to have anal sex with a man, out of an experience of sex with a woman who inserted her finger into his anus during intercourse. Don found the experience pleasurable and on this basis he expressed a desire to have sex with a man. 'The body's response then had a directing influence on Don's sexual conduct' (Connell, 1995b:61).

> The circuit in this case goes from bodily interaction and bodily experience, via socially structured bodily fantasy (involving the cultural construction of hegemonic and oppressed sexualities), to the construction of fresh sexual relationships centring on new bodily interactions. This is not simply a matter of social meanings or categories being imposed on Don's body, though these meanings are vital to what happens. The body-reflexive practice calls them into play, while the bodily experience - a startling joy - energizes the circuit (Connell, 1995b:62).

The body is inescapable but not fixed. Bodily processes enter into social processes and become part of history - they are both shaped by, and shape, life.

Implicated in Connell's notion of bodily performances, is an understanding of sexual identities that are reliant on a narrative and reflexive process of identity. As I have already suggested narrative identity is a useful concept in coming to an understanding of the structuring and meaning of social action. Sexual practices, as particular forms of social action, can also be understood as being structured through the ontological and public narrative surrounding sexuality. These narratives entail 'drama, plot, explanation, and selective appropriation' (Somers and Gibson, 1994:62). The details, and full implications of narrative identity are explored more fully in Chapter Five.

The notion of narrative identity and story-telling brings us back to the notion of sexual liberation. Frank (1996) sees the telling of stories of the body as important in resisting power. Such an approach may also be relevant to the question of sexual liberation. 'Liberation' is a project, not of the freeing of 'sexuality', but of people who are embedded in sexual social relations, with their own particular embodied desires, construed through narratives of the self. This approach raises the practically important question of ethics - how should I live my sexual life in a way that accords with my desires, fits in with relationships that I am embedded in, and that is just and 'good'?

The Ethics of Sexual Freedom: Mutuality vs Practices of Freedom

Theorising sexual liberation involves turning to a moral or ethical dimension that is unavoidably normative - there is some consideration of how sex *should* be experienced in the lives of individuals. For Reich this involves the valorisation of *mutuality* as the regulating principle in sexual relations. Foucault, on the other hand, has a less communitarian conception of 'practices of freedom' that rely for their normative force on the basis of a more individualistic notion of selves creating and caring for themselves. In the following sections I critically evaluate both Reich and Foucault on the question of ethics. While both have been influential in contemporary sexual politics, Foucault more so now than Reich, neither provides an adequate theorisation of the ethical self or goals for an age of AIDS. To conclude I argue that recent discussions of radical humanism suggest a more worthwhile direction for politics of sexual freedom.

Reich: Self-regulation and Mutuality

There are two aspects to Reich's notion of sexual liberation. Firstly Reich's theory includes a set of normative assumptions about what is to count as an appropriate sexual encounter. These were outlined in the previous section and they play an important role in defining aspects of Reich's ideas about moral sexual action. Secondly, and more importantly here, Reich argued for a form of ethical regulation of sexuality through a 'self-governing character structure'. Moral regulation from an external source should be replaced by *self*-regulation which must be based upon a principle of mutuality. It is this notion of mutuality, seldom mentioned in commentaries on Reich, but nevertheless central to this theory of sexual liberation, that I believe is a retrievable element and moral source for contemporary sexual politics. Mutuality, as a concept, captures the relational and reciprocal nature of human interaction that is intrinsic to sexual relationships. However, there are nonetheless problems and contradictions with the way in which Reich developed the notion of mutuality. In brief, Reich's conception of mutuality is undercut by a prior commitment to a monological conception of 'self-regulation'.

Reich's view of sexual liberation was not of a completely unregulated sexual domain, but of the creation of a sphere that would foster the expression of orgasm in individuals in the context of relations of *mutuality*. It would be a mistake to think that Reich held to the view that orgasm was, in and of itself, an absolute good. Rather, he believed that it was important to make a distinction between what could be achieved through orgasmic sex as a subjective *feeling of satisfaction* compared to a more 'objective' *fulfillment of needs* (Reich, 1980:19). From Reich's perspective it is possible for an individual to lead an active sexual and orgasmic life that is characterised by an inappropriate 'hypersexuality'. Such a form of sexuality demonstrates a *limited* capacity for satisfaction (Reich, 1980:19). For Reich 'real' satisfaction comes with an *appropriate* practice of coitus (ibid). Reich therefore made a distinction between what he called the 'fucking organism' (or neurotic character) and the loving genital character. The former 'can "do it"... anywhere and everywhere, like a frustrated, raving bull or stallion who was away from any female for years on end' (Reich,1975:31). By contrast, the loving genital character pursues sex in relations of *mutuality,* and it is these relations of mutuality that Reich believed were essential to the

appropriate expression of orgasmic potency.

Although Reich differentiated between neurotic and genital character it was clear that genital character was in fact a kind of 'anti-character'. It was unarmoured and therefore more authentic, drawing as it should from the spontaneous desires of the individual. The neurotic character on the other hand was guided by external codes (embedded in compulsory sex-morality) - hence the source of action was outside of the self in the form of compliance with some code laid down by others (Boadella, 1985:46). This 'moral compulsion' inevitably found itself in conflict with instinctual drives which become increasingly blocked from expression. In contrast to the neur tic character, the genital character acted on the basis of being in contact with the basic layer of the self - with its primary needs, feelings and desires. The genital character is therefore *self-regulating* rather than being regulated by external moral codes or the unconscious. The basis of the genital character's behaviour is *rational* as it perceives the environment through direct contact with it - not via a distorted character. This is a form of sex-economic morality which had its source within the individual and operated through a form of self-regulation. It was this self-regulatory morality that Reich characterised as being based on mutuality. He argued that 'it is the essence of sex-economic regulation to avoid absolute rules or norms and to accept the interests of life-affirmation and life enjoyment as the regulators of human society' (Reich, 1949:28).[10] True morality should come from *within,* through the recognition and expression of basic needs. Genital gratification is only possible if these basic, instinctual needs are recognised and met. The individual therefore becomes 'moral' to the same extent that he or she becomes 'genitally happy' (ibid:23). For Reich sex-economic morality produced quite different kinds of sexual experience from that of compulsory sex-morality. Reich argued that it would demand mutuality in sexual intercourse (ibid:27) and would reject 'the rape ideology and the attitude that the woman should be seduced or at least gently subdued' into having intercourse (ibid:27). Sexual relations under the new morality would not prohibit sex between adolescents of the opposite sex, but support it. Premarital sex would be encouraged and extramarital sex was seen as defensible in relationships where sexual intimacy had ceased

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10.   While Reich says that he rejects external repressive norms, clearly his ideas about the appropriate context for orgasm, as discussed earlier, rest upon a particular normative view of what counts as appropriate sex. Reich is blind to the underlying normative structure of his own theory.

(ibid:26).

While this new regime appears remarkably permissive for its time Reich did not intend it as a sexual free-for-all.   Rape, prostitution, and adult-child sexual relations are deemed inappropriate, because they lack the quality of truly mutual relations (although Reich did not specify what such relations would consist of).   Reich argued that adult-child sexual relations would be submitted to 'moral inhibition' and would be severely punished (ibid:23).   Such relations had to be understood as 'secondary anti-social drives' created by a compulsory morality in which *basic* needs have been repressed (ibid:22).   Reich believed that these anti-social drives would eventually disappear after the revolution in the absence of the authoritarian patriarchal family and compulsory sex morality.   In the meantime, during the period of transition, there would be *'moral regulations* for secondary, asocial drives and *sex-economic self-regulation* for natural biological needs' (ibid:24 - my emphasis).   The new free society, devoid of compulsory sex morality, 'will provide ample room and security for the gratification of *natural* needs' (Reich, 1949:23).

Reich is to be commended for stressing the importance of mutuality in sexual relations. However, the concept remains remarkably abstract in his work and lacks any specific content. Reich does not adequately explain the *source* of mutuality in relations with others.   Indeed, his endorsement of mutual relations is undercut by the monological view of human action and needs, that is entailed in his version of 'self-regulation'.   This model of sexual liberation presupposes the existence of needs that are 'biological' in origin and that exist outside of social relations.   Moreover Reich sees these needs as good in themselves.   This conceptualisation of 'need' is monological. Needs are located *within* individuals and without reference to *others*.   Reich is insufficiently attentive to the interpretive process that is involved in defining needs and setting out how they might be satisfied.   The individual in Reich's model is dislocated from any defining, constraining or enabling social context. Indeed Reich writes as if the institutional and symbolic relationships in which humans are embedded are 'external' norms, that may become 'internalised', but that can be removed through therapy and character analysis. Such a view neglects the way in which autonomy is actually dependent 'upon the grids of social relationality' (Somers and Gibson, 1994:73). These are

in fact constitutive of 'self, identity and agency' (ibid). Individuals are treated as neutral bearers of basic needs (the most important of which is for sexual release). There is no recognition here of the profoundly gendered character of sexual relations. Nor is Reich able to account, or allow, for expressions of sexual love outside a norm of heterosexuality.

It could therefore be argued that Reich's claims are an example of what Seyla Benhabib calls the 'expressivist model of action' (Benhabib, 1986:84). In this model, action is viewed as exteriorising an interior (for Reich the interior is comprised of his largely unspecified 'basic needs'). What this model of action ignores is the intersubjective and communicative nature of action. Benhabib, correctly in my view, locates the meaning and purpose of action in an interpretive practice between subjects (Benhabib, 1986:87). Human action cannot be the property of *individuals* because they enter a world of others who may react, interpret, resist and ignore the subject in ways not anticipated by him or her. The expression of basic needs can only occur in the context of others with whom one is having sexual relations. Even in masturbation there is usually an imaginary *other* (on paper or in one's head) that is social rather than entirely self-defined.

If this general critique holds true, Reich's concept of mutuality only begins to identify the conditions through which 'free' and good sexual relations can occur. A better understanding of mutuality has to be developed in the context of a more adequate theorisation of the self, identity and the relational nature of human action. By reclaiming mutuality as a moral source for sexual liberation, I am not suggesting that Reich has 'got it right', but that this concept, suitably refigured, is a useful component in a wider notion of sexual liberation.

Foucault: Practices of Freedom and an Aesthetics of Existence

Foucault rejected the notion that we should pursue the project of a one-off *liberation* of our sexuality from the shackles of power. He suggested that this concept of liberation misses the moral problem which is the *practice* of liberty. He asks 'How can one practice freedom? In the order of sexuality, is it obvious that in liberating one's desires one will know how to

behave ethically in pleasurable relationships with others?'(Foucault, 1988:4).[11] Instead he argues that we should attend to the problem of trying to decide 'the *practices of freedom* through which we could determine what is sexual pleasure and what are our erotic, loving, passionate relationships with others' (ibid:3 - my emphasis). This notion of freedom is connected to Foucault's conception of autonomy as involving on-going processes of critique and creation of the self (McNay, 1992:90).

Foucault's 'practices of freedom' were developed in the context of his notion of an ethics of the self characterised by aesthetic and stylistic criteria. Foucault was uninterested in morality as a set of externally imposed codes of behaviour but in ethics as the *process* by which individuals turn themselves into the right kind of person. Whereas Reich saw autonomy as consisting of a rational process of self-regulation, in which individuals would choose mutual relations, Foucault rejected such a view in favour of 'self-creation'. '"Ethical" refers to the kind of person one is supposed to aspire to be, the kind of life one is incited to lead or the special moral state one is invited to attain' (Rajchman, 1985a:172). Foucault defines ethics as being distinct from the moral code and people's actual moral behaviour. Rather it is the sphere that 'determines how the individual is supposed to *constitute* himself as a moral subject of his own actions' (Foucault, 1984b:352). Here ethics is unavoidably about the constitution of subjectivity, something that individuals 'do to themselves'.[12] His interest is therefore in the practices, or techniques, of self through which individuals are incited to become moral. It is through these practices of self that individuals experience their freedom as they *create* themselves rather than by 'expressing true needs'. Ethics of the self are not concerned with authenticity, but rather with who it is possible for us to *become*. There is no attempt to define who we *really are*, since this traps us in an ontology of desire where we seek the truth of ourselves. Rather, freedom consists of the ability to recognise the ways in which individuals are constituted through the processes of subjectivisation, to struggle against these processes, and to create a work of art of the self. Foucault is impressed by the

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11.   Here Foucault misinterprets Reich's programme by ignoring the moral force that Reich gives to the ideal of mutuality.

12.   This is in contrast to Foucault's earlier studies of objectifying practises - what *others* do to us. Foucault's studies of ethics is therefore somewhat at odds with his earlier work on the construction of sexual subjectivity through normalising and disciplining discourses of sexuality.

figure of Baudelaire - 'the dandy' - because he makes of his life a work of art and continually invents himself anew.

This interest in the means by which individuals create forms of the self in a self-conscious fashion, turned Foucault towards the study of the arts or aesthetics of existence. These are the:

> intentional and voluntary actions by which men not only set themselves rules of conduct, but also seek to transform themselves, to change themselves in their singular being, and to make their life into an *oeuvre* that carries certain aesthetic values and meets certain stylistic criteria (Foucault, 1985:10-11 - original emphasis).

While Foucault is clearly turning towards a more active notion of the subject, this view exists in tension with other ideas about the discursive construction of the self. Foucault develops the notion of an 'autonomous self' through his studies of Greek and Roman sexual ethics, in which he examined the self-mastery produced by Greeks which gave them 'an active freedom'. He says that:

> I am interested ... in the way in which the subject constituted himself in an *active fashion*, by the practices of self, these practices are nevertheless not something that the individual invents by himself. They are patterns that he finds in his culture and which are proposed, suggested and imposed on him by his culture, his society and his social group (Foucault, 1988a:11).

With these ideas Foucault is seeking to explore the nature of the *relationship* between individual and society in which discourses and social processes are overdetermining, but there is also some recognition that the individual possesses a degree of agency and self-determination. It is this model of ethics and reconceptualisation of freedom that has been seen as attractive by some contemporary feminist and gay writers. However, I believe that it heads in a direction that is ultimately untenable. In particular Foucault's idea of ethics as (aesthetic) practices of freedom, utilises an inadequate understanding of the relationship between the self and others. Secondly, where Foucault emphasises aesthetics and style as the determining criteria of an ethical mode of existence, it raises the difficulty of judging between better and worse practices or technologies of the self. Thirdly, Foucault does not sufficiently account for the inequalities that frequently exist between subjects, and in particular, his form of ethics is androcentric. Finally, Foucault's statements about the autonomy of the individual, resting in the ability to create new ways of being, is undercut by his conceptualisation of the link between knowledge and power.

Firstly it should be noted that Foucault's concept of ethics as the self's relation with the self favours a notion of ethics as an *isolated* process of self-stylisation. There is little real acknowledgement of the way in which the self is located in a community of others through a process of interaction with them. Foucault's notion of ethics privileges a mode of action concerned with *self-transformation* as an end in itself. As such I suggest that it is a post- or anti-modernist version of procedural rationality. Therefore Taylor's critique of the proceduralism of liberal theory can be useful in this context. Procedural morality proceeds through focusing on what it is *right* to do. For the liberal theorist the focus is on the reasoning style that is used. In Foucauldian theory what is 'right' is that individuals should submit themselves to the *procedures* involved in various technologies of self. The focus is on the fact that individuals exercise their will through these techniques and spiritual exercises. From Taylor's perspective, such an emphasis does not give sufficient attention to the 'strong evaluations' that are central to human agency and identity. It is these 'evaluations', these moral frameworks that are taken to be 'good', that are ultimately responsible for providing us with reasons for action. Therefore, ethics as a form of spiritual exercise does not sufficiently embody the dialogical nature of human action, nor does it value mutual recognition as a form of freedom.

Foucault's ethics also employs a problematic philosophy of the subject in which individual will is paramount. Such a philosophy of the subject 'privileges an objectifying attitude in which the "knowing subject" regards its self and other individuals as it would passive entitities in the external world' (McNay, 1992:166). Here ethics becomes primarily a matter of self-mastery and authorial creation and it valorises a view of the self as a sexual monad 'accountable only to the dictates of our personal tastes and dispositions, and hence [abstracted] entirely from questions of inter-personal dependency and need' (Soper, 1993:38). Moreover such spiritual exercise is primarily an activity characterised by the 'labour' or work of the participants. As such it is a form of 'performative-expressivist action' in which the self-enhancement of the actor is the main rationale for the action (Benhabib, 1986:139). Under such a model of activity there is little recognition of any 'others' who may or may not act in concert with the self's intentions, desires and purposes. According to Benhabib expressivist action is therefore unable to capture the dimension of human action

through which there are 'other subjects with whom we have to *communicate* and to whom we have to *justify* our purposes and intentions' (Benhabib, 1986:137 -original emphasis). Therefore, Foucault's notion of an aesthetics of existence works on the basis of an instrumentalist relation with others 'in which the self is seen to measure the significance of the worlds inhabited by others in terms only of his or her own insatiable needs to imaginatively extend the scope of their own possibilities' (Johnson, 1994:125). Such an approach can not recognise the importance of collective goals 'or the ways in which individual lives might be lived in the light of something that transcended these' (Grimshaw, 1993:68). What is missing from Foucault's ethics of the self is 'the idea that there might be a morality, painfully fashioned no doubt, which rejects the idea of unproblematic "universalism" ... but which aims nevertheless for mutuality and collectivity as crucial organising principles for the conduct of individual lives' (Grimshaw, 1993:68). Foucault's conceptualisation of the self therefore ends up assuming a 'heroic personality' in possession of certain special capacities that allow the individual's resistance to 'processes of carceral subjugation' (Johnson, 1994:125).

The second and third points are related. To the extent that Foucault focuses on *self-transformation* as the *raison d'etre* of ethics, he is not able to explain why individuals might choose one form technology of the self over another, nor why some technologies might be 'better' than others. His approach, therefore, does not adequately address the issue of the *hierarchy* amongst different practices of the self. Moreover, 'Foucault does not distinguish sufficiently between practices that are merely "suggested" to the individual and practices that are more or less "imposed" in so far as they are heavily laden with cultural sanctions and taboos' (McNay, 1992:74-5). There is quite a difference in the real autonomy involved in different practices, depending on *how free* one is in making certain choices. It is also important to note that without some normative standards to refer to, it is very difficult to distinguish between practices of self that are trivial stylisations of life and those that are more oppositional and emancipatory (McNay, 1992:147). As a related point, it can also be noted that the question of the freedom of one group to assert its 'aesthetics of existence' may come at the expense of another group's freedom. Jeffrey Weeks powerfully evokes the problems associated with a focus on individual self-transformation which embraces:

> not only a search for sexual free space [...] but also a space for the self-appointed elect, the born-again religious whose toleration of others (especially the sexually different) may be extremely limited. The dream of a proliferation of cities on the hill, created by artists for life, all too often comes to naught because of the power of the small towns on the plain, their moral certainties crushing all but the true believer (Weeks, 1995:70).

As Linda McNay points out by privileging 'care of the self' as the means by which freedom may be attained for everyone, Foucault ignores the way in which 'a white/male/heterosexual caring for himself correctly, may necessarily imply the domination of black/female/gay "other" who, because of his/her relatively subordinate position in terms of access to resources and authority, does not have the power to resist such domination' (McNay, 1992:172). This neglect on Foucault's part to address gendered power relations in any depth is an aspect of his androcentrism. This term should not be reduced to merely pointing out that Foucault's studies of ancient ethics are concerned largely with elite men.[13] Rather, a more telling point is that because Foucault's studies abstracted the ethical codes from their social context and the dialectic of relations between men and women, he ends up defining ethical 'so as to make it appear a very private - and masculine - affair; a matter primarily of self-mastery and authorial creation' (Soper, 1993:41).

Finally there is at the heart of Foucault's work a major contradiction between his assertions that autonomy and reflexivity are necessary to the self's creation of itself and his conceptualisations of knowledge and power. The notion that individuals might be able to engage in critical self-reflection is undercut by the way in which Foucault theorises knowledge and power. For Foucault there is no distance or autonomous identity between discourse and practice (McNay, 1992:149). Because knowledge is always a relation of power, and power is positive, that is it *produces* practices (rather than repressing them); there can be no place in which individuals can reflect upon and develop a critical distance from practice. Knowledge and practice are one, and that one is power. In Foucault's conceptualisation of the practices of the self, knowledge is of a practical kind. That is, it is about the concrete and specific ways in which individuals use certain *techniques* to fashion

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13.   As Soper quite rightly notes Foucault 'has no option but to reflect the social pre-eminence of [elite male citizens] since it was largely responsible for the dominant culture' (Soper, 1993:39), and Foucault was also quite aware of the sexism and elitism of the ideas that he studied.

themselves. Because this knowledge of self is 'inseparable from its practical application, individuals are not necessarily completely aware or able to articulate the full implications or meaning of their practices' (McNay, 1992:150). However, such an approach does not do justice to the way in which knowledge (which is after all not unitary) not only constitutes selves but may help us to critique and reject knowledge-power that 'oppresses'. McNay argues that we *need* a separation of theory and practice in order to make the kind of critical reflection on both theoretical formulations and practices of power that makes change possible. By assuming that knowledge and power are indissolubly linked, Foucault does not acknowledge that individuals are able to reflect critically 'on the disjunction between their experience and the categories of power-knowledge' (McNay, 1992:153). Indeed the force of Foucault's account of the analogy between modern medicine and the psychological sciences and premodern confession, actually relies on some appreciation of what modern science teaches us.

> The rhetorical power of the comparisons, between the clinical and white-coated gaze of the contemporary therapist and the unctuous probings of the religious confessor, rests on a liberation from our awe for the latter which the former has helped us to dispel (Soper, 1993:46).

Radical Humanism and Sexual Autonomy: Values, Authenticity and Narrative Identity in Sexual Freedom

If neither Reich's 'self-regulation' nor Foucault's 'practices of freedom' succeed as models of sexual freedom what other possibilities exist? Sex now exists in the context of a social, sexual world that is characterised through its vast range of sexual identities, practices and relationships, as well as through the continuing hegemony of the institution of heterosexuality. Moreover sex and death are materially and symbolically linked through the threat of HIV risk. Under such conditions the question of how we should live sexually, 'freely', safely and ethically is complex and difficult. In particular two interrelated issues are raised:

(i)   the question of what the 'ends' of freedom are; and

(ii)   the moral self that is a sexual/ethical actor.

Reich and Foucault have addressed these issues in very different ways. Reich's humanist position saw him valorising a universal human sexual essence encapsulated as cosmic orgone

energy. The goal of sexual freedom was therefore attainment of an autonomy characterised by 'self-regulation' in which individuals were able to express natural needs and desires. While Reich also contextualised self-regulation within an ideal of mutual relations between others his theoretical view of the human subject was ultimately monological and therefore the ideal of mutuality existed in an uneasy and contradictory relationship to the rest of his theory. Moreover, the individual at the heart of Reich's theory was an unproblematised universal (and masculine) subject. For Foucault, on the other hand, freedom was understood as being about the creation of new and critical ways of being. The universal subject of humanism was rejected in favour of a self somehow heroically able to reject the normalising influence of disciplinary power. In the previous sections, I have argued that both of these approaches to humanism are problematic, however this does not necessarily lead to a blanket dismissal of humanist ideals. On the contrary, if humanism is indeed 'an incomplete project' (Johnson, 1994:7), involving different and competing 'humanisms', then it may be possible to recuperate a new radical form of humanism.

Humanism may indeed prove to be a powerful moral source for an emancipatory politics of sexual freedom. However, aspects of its universalism will have to be rescued from an inappropriate understanding of the humanist subjectivity as characterised by 'arbitrary self-assertion and instrumentalising aspirations' (Johnson, 1994:8). Such a 'radical humanism', briefly introduced at the beginning of this chapter, argues that the main problem with anti-humanism is its neglect of a core dilemma that lies at the heart of humanism.

> On the one hand, the dynamic concept of person raises the claim that beyond the constellation of contingencies of birth there exists a primary status as members of a generic "humanity". Parallel with this aspiration to consider all humans in these universalising terms, a dynamic concept of person expresses a desire to affirm particularity, to raise awareness and respect for the uniqueness of all forms of individuality: this desire has served as a basis from which to decry the totalising character of all images of a common humanity (Johnson, 1994:10).

The problem with anti-humanism is that it focuses on the first universalising aspect of humanism without taking account of humanism's attention to the particularities of personhood. While humanism is historically specific and contingent, it nonetheless incorporates a set of cultural ideals (of self-determining autonomy and authentic self-realisation) that now have a 'universal status' which is almost impossible to repudiate

(Johnson, 1994:11). The task of radicaₗ humanism is to develop an approach that recognises the tension that exists between humanism's universalism and 'the always particularistic, culture-bound terms in which these universalising claims are raised' (Johnson, 1994:135). Such an approach takes various forms in the context of different theoretical and political domains. For example, Johnson's arguments in favour of radical humanism are part of her claim that feminism is a form of humanism and that anti-humanist feminists are misguided in their uniform rejection of universalism.

In the realm of sexual theory and politics, Jeffrey Weeks' most recent writings have attempted to use radical humanism to solve some of the difficulties associated with developing a sexual ethics in a postmodern era.[14] Just as Johnson draws on the ideas of Heller and Feher (1988), so too Weeks explores the way in which the 'empirical universals' of freedom and life give some critical edge to a post-metaphysical humanism. For Weeks, radical humanism is the best response to a sexual world increasingly characterised by three things. Firstly, there is the 'sense of an ending' of a sexual era. As the year 2000 approaches, we are faced by the threat of AIDS in ending previous (assumed, if not real) sexual freedoms. These endings exist in a time of 'postmodernity' which brings its own sense of change and uncertainty. Secondly, the selves that face this sense of ending are faced with the fact that we 'have no choice but to choose' (Weeks, 1995:33) between the increasingly diverse sexual options that confront us. The self that has to choose is the site of a vast array of theoretical interpretations and Weeks points to the tension between the postmodern valorisation of flux and instability in subjectivity and the reality of lived experience in which identities and narratives of the self are clung to 'in order to negotiate the hazards of everyday life' (Weeks, 1995:33). Finally, there is the question of *how to live* at the end of an era with the social identities that we are currently embedded within. Weeks argues that the question of how to live enters a realm of sexuality and personal relationships that is increasingly understood as 'democratic'. The promises of the democratisation of sexuality are barely being met, yet they form a new post-traditional context in which personal relationships may be lived out.

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14.   As early attempts at this see 'Post-modern AIDS?' (1990a) and 'The Value of Difference' (1990b). However the arguments of *Invented Moralities: Sexual Values in an Age of Uncertainty* (1995) have developed this idea most cogently and are the basis of my comments here.

Weeks sees in radical humanism a form of humanism 'which respects diversity and the maximization of individual choice, while affirming at the same time the importance of the human bond' (Weeks, 1995:42). While there is much to commend in this formulation of a new post-AIDS sexual ethics (and I will be using aspects of Weeks' theorisations in my discussions), I believe that there are problems with the way in which Foucault's work has been taken as a moral source for this new ethic. In the previous section, I outlined why I believed that Foucault's formulations on ethics are inadequate; here I will briefly discuss why I think that the *self*-defined autonomy at the heart of Foucault's work cannot sustain the kind of dialogicality and mutuality that Weeks endorses and that he draws from authors such as Charles Taylor.

Weeks sees in aspects of Foucault's work an approach to sexuality which is at once deconstructive and challenging of norms and also reconstructive, concerned as he is with inventing new forms of erotic life. In particular Foucault's concept of practices of freedom is seen as a way of breaking free from the binary model of 'repression/liberation' that has dominated radical sexual theory since the nineteenth century (Weeks, 1995:56). However, as I have argued earlier, I believe that some notion of liberation (of *people* rather than sexuality as such) is unavoidable given that there exists a 'real' bodily dimension to sex. Even Foucault cannot avoid 'ontological gerrymandering' - we are not yet at a point analytically where a suitably reassessed model of 'repression/liberation' can be dispatched. Weeks also finds in the notion of practices of freedom, a model of ethics where new bodily pleasures can be explored and our sexual and ethical selves reinvented (ibid:57). While Weeks is aware that this model of ethics could develop into one of 'anything goes', he believes that Foucault's emphasis on freedom of *choice* rather than freedom of *acts* avoids the harm that is associated with some acts. However, the emphasis on choice opens up a series of questions about which choices are the ones to be accepted and which rejected. In order to answer this kind of question Weeks argues that we need to:

> clarify the values which might help us to decide which forms of diversity are life enhancing, and which are profoundly inhumane, which choices are free and informed, and which are enforced (Weeks, 1995:59).

In so doing Weeks actually takes a decisive step *away* from Foucault's freedom of choice. He discusses favourably Taylor's critique of forms of ethics (among which Foucault's must

be numbered) that are based on a 'soft relativism'. These forms of ethics are constructed so that the act of choice is what conveys worth, rather than an examination of the substantive nature of the choices made. Arguably, though, Foucault's essentially proceduralist 'freedom of choice' is incompatible with Taylor's substantive rationality. Weeks must choose between the two, and the development of his ethic of love demonstrates more of an allegiance to a Taylorist approach than a Foucauldian one.

The difficulties associated with seeing Foucault's work as a moral source for sexual ethics in my view compromises rather than supports Weeks' persuasive arguments about the form of radical humanism that is appropriate in an 'age of uncertainty'. Weeks endorses four important values that he believes negotiate the tensions between universalism and particularism within modern humanism.

> Care, responsibility, respect and knowledge: these are more than minor virtues. They speak for a system of values in relationships which make individual autonomy possible while encouraging diversity to flourish (Weeks, 1995:73).

Care involves a real recognition of the other person's needs and desires and of their autonomy. It is not the smothering or self-abnegating love sometimes associated with women's caring labour, but involves a relation of equality between the carer and that one cared for (Weeks, 1995:179). Moreover care must exist in the context of responsibility - 'as a voluntary act, expressing our response to the needs, expressed or unexpressed, of others; and receiving in return the responsible behaviour of others' (Weeks, 1995:180). Responsibility in turn involves respecting the dignity of the other. Without such respect it is all too easy to negate the goals of others in unquestioned hierarchical relationships. 'Respect for individuals, in their individuality and diversity, already therefore implies a cultural and political programme which seeks to eliminate institutionalized discrimination and domination' (Weeks, 1995:182). Finally, the ability to respect and care for others responsibly, requires an adequate knowledge of our own and others' needs. It is:

> not a heavy wish for total knowledge of others, which is the denial of the privacy of the other, but a delicacy of concern which is sensitive to the needs of our partners, creating a space for understanding where difference can flourish while solidarity grows (Weeks, 1995:184).

These four components of Weeks' ethic of love provide a powerful set of ideals that, while having a wider applicability, are also tremendously useful in thinking about how safe sex can

be conceptualised as existing within the realm of freedom. In a discussion of the forms of safe sex that have developed in gay communities Weeks highlights how:

> Safer sex became a means of negotiating sex and love, of building a respect for self and others, in a climate of risk and fear. From this point of view safer sex was a way of recovering the erotic, not a defensive reaction to it, based on the minimization, if not complete elimination, of risk, in relationships of mutual trust and responsibility (Weeks, 1995:181).

The four values that Weeks identifies put a very particular slant on the meaning of sexual autonomy. If sexual autonomy is a form of self-determination, it is only by virtue of the self's location in relations of *mutuality* with others. That is, each individual's ability to seek and obtain the pleasures and emotional satisfactions desired, are reliant on the reciprocal recognition of the other. Sexual autonomy must therefore be 'democratic' and this therefore implies *responsibility to others* as a necessary condition of individual 'freedom'.

> Democratic autonomy puts the obligation on the individual to express his or her desires in ways which respect the claims of the other, in forms which are moral for that individual, and which acknowledge and attempt to deal with the *inequalities* which inevitably intrude between social actors (Weeks, 1995:66 - my emphasis).

Much of what has been said above implies a certain kind of sexual/ethical self that is the subject of sexual freedom. In particular it assumes that freedom for individuals involves the realisation of an 'authentic self'. Recalling the discussion in Chapter One, although authenticity has sometimes been referred to in a 'debased form', it is possible to recuperate a more radical meaning for authenticity which is more than some simplistic search for self-fulfillment. The realisation or expression of an authentic self must occur in the context of our relations with others, which we are always, already, dependent upon, as well as on a broader 'horizon of significance' (Taylor, 1991:50). Yet, crucially, neither Reich nor Foucault can offer a model of the authentic self that helps in such deliberations over sexual freedom. Reich's self (the genital character) relies on an asocial core of the individual, while Foucault's notion of an invented self neglects the background of significance that a developed notion of 'the good' can provide. In contrast to these notions of the self, another model which highlights the significance of authenticity recognises that the search for a 'meaningful life' involves the individual constantly expanding and confronting new challenges in the context of 'safe-keeping of the *unity* of that person and of the chosen *value-hierarchy*' (Heller, 1984:268, cited in Weeks, 1995:71). Such a notion of authenticity also implies that personal

autonomy involves the development of an integrated life story that has a narrative form. As Benhabib expresses it:

> When the story of a life can only be told from the perspective of the others, then the self is a victim and sufferer who has lost control over her existence. When the story of a life can only be told from the standpoint of the individual, then such a self is a narcissist and a loner who may have attained autonomy without solidarity. Justice and autonomy alone cannot sustain and nourish that web of narratives in which human beings' sense of selfhood unfolds; but solidarity and care alone cannot raise the self to the level not only of being the subject but also the author of a coherent life-story (Benhabib, 1992:198).

Such a conclusion seems to me right, and ultimately it works against some key Foucauldian notions, which as a consequence could be seen as less pivotal to Weeks' radical humanism than he thinks.

The questions of authenticity, autonomy and narrativity which have been raised in this chapter in relation to 'human' sexual liberation, have also been of vital concern to those groups of men and women who have felt excluded from the realm of freedom. In the following two chapters I explore the debates amongst feminists and gay theorists about the most appropriate form of sexual freedom to pursue.

CHAPTER THREE

FEMINISM AND SEXUAL LIBERATION:
A CONTRADICTION IN TERMS?

The previous chapter outlined two very different models of human sexual freedom. Both Reich and Foucault, in different ways, have been influential in feminist debates about the meaning of sexual freedom for women. Reich's model of a repressive sexual sphere and core sexual essence contributed to early second wave feminist arguments for women's sexual liberation. And Foucault's writings on the discursive nature of 'sexuality' have shaped the pluralist feminist search for women's sexual pleasure. However, at the heart of the wide-ranging feminist debates about sexuality and sexual freedom has been the question of whether women's liberation is compatible with a project for sexual liberation. In Chapter One I briefly outlined a debate between those feminists who see fucking and freedom as mutually exclusive, and those who do not. In this chapter, I critically evaluate the contours of that debate around the question of how best to conceptualise the connection between women's sexual authenticity and sexual autonomy.

The Feminist Sex Debates: Competing Meanings of Authenticity and Autonomy
    Pleasure vs Danger, Pluralist vs Radical Feminism
Steven Seidman suggests that the feminist sexuality debates are concerned with defining the 'moral boundaries of eros' (1992:97). These debates, which reached a crescendo in the mid-1980s, have nonetheless been a concern of feminists for much longer. The question of women's relationship to sexuality was raised by feminists as early as the 1830s and 1840s in the link that was made between male sexuality and female oppression, particularly in relation to prostitution and female illness (Snitow, Stansell & Thompson, 1984:14). In the late Nineteenth century the concerns of both the social purity movement (focused on prostitution and venereal disease), and voluntary motherhood came to be seen as key elements in the

oppression of women. It could well be argued that at this time women's sexual freedom was conceptualised largely *negatively,* as emancipation from 'sex slavery' (Jackson, 1994:3). However, it can also be argued, as Snitow, Stansell and Thompson (1984) have done, that the battle for sexual freedom was somewhat more contradictory and that a more *positive* freedom for women to pursue sexual pleasure was also part of these campaigns. For example advocates of voluntary motherhood were concerned to break the control men had over when sex should occur. At the same time, they rejected the hegemonic understanding of women as asexual and instead recognised a female sexual nature, admittedly 'maternal', but nonetheless seeking 'expression in physical union with a beloved partner' (Snitow et al, 1984:15). By the early part of the twentieth century feminists were articulating in a more concerted fashion the connection that could be made between feminism and sexual liberation.[1]

These early feminist debates illustrate the dilemma that has come to haunt contemporary feminism on the question of sexuality - are fucking and freedom mutually exclusive? Is sexuality so thoroughly colonised by men's power that women should vacate the field (except in lesbian relationships[2]), or is there the opportunity for women to express their sexual autonomy by remaking sexual relationships with men (and women)? The feminist sex debates over these questions have come to be framed variously as tensions between *pleasure* versus *danger* (Vance, 1984b); women's *equality* with men (in the search for sexual pleasure) versus their *difference* from men (in valourising care and love over pleasure) (Bacchi, 1990); and women's *autonomous rights* to diverse sexual pleasures versus their *need for security* (and protection from male violence and power) (Bacchi, 1990). These poles line up with Seidman's categorisation of the broader sexuality debates as characterised by an ideology of libertarianism versus an ideology of romanticism (Seidman, 1992).

Each pole of these tensions is associated with a particular feminist theoretical perspective.

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1.   For example see the discussion by Trimberger (1984) on feminism and sexual love in Greenwich Village in the 1910s and 1920s, and Rupp (1989) on Doris Stevens' advocacy of the same.

2.   And even this is contested by some radical feminists who argue that lesbian relationships can only offer an authentic realm of sexual expression when they are free of contaminating role-playing and s/m practices.

It is most commonly argued that a pluralist feminism squares off against a radical feminism (see Ferguson, 1989; Sawicki, 1988; Bacchi, 1990).[3] In brief pluralist feminists argue that women have rights alongside men for the satisfaction of their sexual desires no matter what form these desires take. Pluralist feminists, therefore, tend towards the acceptance of an ideology of libertarianism and 'a dialectic of pleasure'[4] (Ferguson, 1989:156). On the other, hand radical feminists maintain that it is a contradiction in terms for feminists to pursue sexual liberation, because sexuality is the key site for men's control of women's lives. Sexual freedom is only possible in the context of women's intimate relationships with each other, therefore radical feminists share in what Seidman has called an ideology of romanticism. From this perspective the privileged meaning of sex is tied to its communicative and affective elements. This can also be linked to Ferguson's (1989:156) 'dialectic of intimacy'.[5]

What should be noted here is that it is not possible to understand either pole without understanding what it is opposed to, for as Elizabeth Fox-Genovese argues 'no politics remains innocent of that which it contests' (Fox-Genovese, 1979:94, quoted in Echols, 1984b:62). Each pole of the feminist debate was developed in the context of its battle against what it saw as an unacceptable other position. For radical feminists,[6] an emphasis on *sexual danger*, women's *difference* from men and women's need for *security* first arose out of a concern with some of the early seventies feminists endorsement of the project of sexual liberation. For radical feminists sexual liberation was seen as profoundly problematic for women. Similarly, pluralist feminists developed their views with an almost demonised image of radical feminism as their target. They accused radical feminists of being anti-sex, prudish, and focusing too much on sexual dangers. Radical feminists were seen as more interested in maintaining a female counter-culture than in exploring women's potential for *pleasure* and *self-determination*. By doing so, radical feminists have moved away from the original tenets

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3.   Note however that radical feminists such as Sheila Jeffreys and Janice Raymond argue that libertarian feminists are not really *feminists* at all from a radical feminist perspective.

4.   This dialectic emphasises that pleasure is a legitimate goal of sex, and that freedom and equality are guiding principles.

5.   This dialectic prioritises love and intimacy over genital forms of pleasure (Ferguson, 1989:162).

6.   For example Andrea Dworkin, Catharine MacKinnon, Susan Griffin, Susan Daly, and Sheila Jeffreys.

of radical feminist perspective toward a new, more conservative, *cultural* feminism (see Echols, 1984a,b and Segal, 1987 for discussion of these issues).[7] The libertarian/pluralist critique of the cultural feminism of the eighties has now become the focus of a more recent radical feminist rejection of libertarian feminism (e.g. Jeffreys, 1990, 1994; Leidholdt & Raymond, 1990; Jackson, 1994). Radical feminists for their part accuse libertarian feminists of focussing too much on women's sexual pleasures and neglecting the way that sex is tied to male power.

The particular labels used of each feminist opponent reflects the author's judgement of this brand of feminism. For cultural and radical feminists the opponent is a *libertarian* feminism, that is hardly feminist at that. Other authors favour using the term pluralist[8] and focus on recognising the equal value of sexual difference alongside a recognition of sexual danger. In this discussion I generally refer to 'radical' and 'pluralist' feminists because these labels most accurately reflect the self-interpretations of the various authors as well as being more inclusive. For example radical feminism includes but is not limited to cultural feminism, and pluralist feminists, while tending towards libertarianism also include feminists who at least recognise the dangers of libertarianism. There is a danger that by highlighting opposed positions *differences* will be exaggerated and any shared theoretical and political views between the positions may be glossed over. Indeed, protagonists in these debates have often been blind to similarities in their positions. For example, Jana Sawicki (1988), using a Foucauldian model, has highlighted the ways in which radical and pluralist feminists both share a repressive model of power and tend towards an essentialist view of sex. Notwithstanding this critique, I believe that this way of discussing different feminist perspectives does capture meaningful differences that continue to influence contemporary feminist debates on sexual matters.

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7.   Cultural feminism refers to those forms of radical feminist analysis which valorise female difference as a source of moral superiority compared with 'male' characteristics.

8.   See for example Ferguson (1989), Sawicki (1988).

The Barnard Conference and its Aftermath

A contemporary feminist movement divided over sexuality, was in part constructed in relation to the now (in)famous Barnard Conference held in New York in 1982. This conference aimed to focus on women's *pleasure* in sex because some feminists were concerned that radical feminists were increasingly articulating a one-sided focus on women's sexual *danger*. The work of Andrea Dworkin (1980), Laura Lederer (1980), Susan Griffin (1981) and Catharine MacKinnon (1987) on pornography were seen as particularly problematic. Another more positive impetus for the conference came from the publication of the 'Sex Issue' of *Heresies: A Feminist Publication on Art and Politics* (1981). And in 1982 the radical feminist critique *Against Sadomasochism* joined the pro-s/m publication *Coming to Power: Writings and Graphics on Lesbian S/M*. The conference and publication of these books generated an enormous debate amongst feminists, not only in the United States but also in the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada.

Planning for the conference began in 1981. A concept paper, written by Carole Vance on behalf of the planning committee was distributed to speakers and workshop convenors before the conference. This pre-conference paper provided radical feminists with the opportunity to organise an anti-conference coalition comprising Women Against Pornography, Women Against Violence Against Women, and New York Radical Feminists. This coalition leafletted the conference and held a 'speak-out on incorrect sexuality' (Rich, 1986:527) in which individual feminists were denounced for practicing 'anti-feminist sexuality'. The administration of Barnard College, partly in response to radical feminist protest, seized the Conference Diary, a sixty page document that included workshop abstracts, bibliographies and seemingly troubling sexual graphics. The Barnard Conference can be seen as an ignition point for what had previously been simmering disagreements between radical and other feminists.[9] It sparked off a series of further publications and debates in feminist journals. Many of the conference papers were published in the much lauded and reviled anthology

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9.   Katie King is critical of the way that commentary on the sex debates has focussed too narrowly on the Barnard conference and 'its synecdochic expansion, the academy' (1990:84). She argues that the sexuality debates are much broader, incorporating the critiques of women of colour who, in a different context, write about sexuality, racism and power. My reason for focusing on this conference and the related literature, is that it reveals the central elements of the context in which the feminist sexuality debates during the eighties were conducted.

Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality (Vance, 1984b). Around the same time two other influential books were published - the British collection *Sex and Love* (1983) and *Desire: The Politics of Sexuality* (1984).[10] There are now several major commentaries on the feminist sex debates from a number of different theoretical perspectives.[11]

While the moment of the 'sex wars' has passed, the issues it raised are still relevant. These issues are now more commonly articulated through different debates. For example debates over sexual representation (pornography), heterosexuality, 'deviant' sexual practices and sexual identity now take place in the context of discussions around safe sex, new reproductive technologies and queer theory. My purpose here in examining the feminist sexuality debates is to contribute to those feminist debates about safe sex raised in Chapter One, around the relative merits of the permissive and women-centred discourses of sexuality.

The Heart of the Debates: Authenticity, Recognition and Sexual Autonomy

The feminist sexuality debates have focused on a number of different issues, the most significant being pornography, heterosexuality and, within lesbian relationships the issues of s/m and butch-femme sexual styles. The central issue in relation to pornography has been the role of objectification in women's oppression. For radical feminists pornography is degrading, because it makes objects of women for men's sexual pleasure and is in essence a pedagogy of rape. The pluralist feminist response has been more equivocal on this question, seeing in pornography (at least in feminist or female-created pornography) a potential site for women's active sexuality. The problem of the status of heterosexuality in women's sexual oppression is well-articulated by Lynne Segal when she asks: *'Is it, or is it not, possible for women to conceive of, and enjoy, an active pleasurable engagement in sex with men? Is it, or is it not, possible to see women as empowered agents of heterosexual desire?'* (Segal, 1992:79 - emphasis in the original). Debates over lesbian role-playing and s/m have raised the issue of the role that power plays in sexual practice. While each of these issues is of interest in itself, and has generated an enormous literature, my main aim is to explore the

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10.   First published in the United States under the title *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality* (1983).

11.   See for example Bacchi (1990), Ferguson (1989), Rich (1986), Freccero (1990), Sawicki (1988), King (1990).

underlying question of sexual freedom in the commentary on these issues, and in those places where sexual liberation is addressed more explicitly.

Ann Ferguson has argued that the underlying issue that divides the two poles of the feminist sexuality debates is 'whether consensual sexual pleasure empowers women' (Ferguson, 1989:147). I would argue that an even more basic issue concerns the nature and status of an *authentic* female sexuality and its relationship to sexual autonomy. In the previous chapter, I suggested that debates around humanism were salient to considerations of the meaning of sexual freedom. This position is equally true of feminist debates about the kinds of sexual freedoms that might be available to women. Feminists, for the most part, have been critical of the ways in which social theory and political programmes, such as those around sexual liberation, have neglected women's needs. They have criticised the universalism of those theories of sexual liberation that treat women as if they were like men in all respects and in so doing ignore the inequalities that exist in gendered sexual relations. Such a critique has lead to a focus on what is peculiarly 'female' in women's experience of sex, to a consideration of women's *authentic* sexuality. However, as Pauline Johnson (1994) has suggested, feminist critiques are in fact indebted to humanism for the force of their arguments. It is therefore appropriate to call feminism a form of radical humanism and as such it is impossible to ignore the range of issues raised *by* humanism.

In the context of the feminist sexuality debates, I would suggest that there are three important analytical dimensions involved in defining 'women's sexual freedom'. The first dimension involves determining the nature of women's sexuality; secondly, analysis must attend to the question of how to deal politically with difference (both women's difference from men and difference within the category of women); and finally a feminist theory of sexual freedom must develop a set of ethical principles for determining how to live within sexual relationships.

On the first question there have been fierce debates about what is to count as an authentic female sexuality. The debates traverse the following kinds of questions:

- Do men and women share a natural core of sexuality?

- What is the role of power in 'inhibiting' authentic desires, or producing 'inauthentic' and debased patriarchal desires?

- What is the nature of the relationship between the body and the self that is involved in sexual practices?

If feminists have been concerned with understanding the ways in which women's authentic sexual desires have come to be limited, they also have an interest in rectifying this situation. Feminism is therefore a politics concerned primarily with calling for the *recognition* of women's sexual identities.   As suggested in Chapter One, a politics of recognition is concerned to address the ways in which aspects of women's identities have been denied recognition through patriarchal forms of power. This is of concern to feminists because they share in the modern humanist view that 'being authentic matters to us' (Taylor, 1991:23) and therefore both radical and pluralist feminists develop forms of identity politics. While both radical and pluralist feminists seek the recognition of women's authentic sexuality, as has already been suggested there is considerable debate over what desires and pleasures are to count as truly authentic and worthy of defence. This has raised the question amongst feminists of what to do with *differences* within the category of 'woman'. Although the *recognition* of women's sexual identity is central to both forms of feminist sexual politics, debates centre around what aspects of women's sexuality are to be accepted.   Does recognition entail the acceptance of a 'human' sexual nature shared by men and women? Or are men and women so different (and men's sexuality so 'power-crazed') that women should search out relationships with each other? Or alternatively, should a feminist sexual politics be concerned with a pluralistic acceptance of the entire range of forms that women's sexuality takes?

The issues raised above in relation to politics are intimately connected to the ethical realm with its concerns about how women should live sexually. What ethical principles should guide the relations between women and their sexual partners? What is clear from all the various writing on pornography, violence, s/m, butch-femme, lesbianism and heterosexuality is that both poles of the debate are arguing about what is to count as 'good' and 'bad' sex. In addressing this issue, feminists draw on, and contribute to debates about authenticity,

autonomy and solidarity. The particular direction this debate takes in relation to the feminist sex wars is through a consideration of the meaning of *female sexual autonomy*. Women's sexual autonomy is understood either as 'autonomy as self-determination' (i.e. as individual women's right to sexual pleasures as and where she sees fit) or as solidarity (understood as women's difference from men and a shared set of female sexual values that are better than men's). In fact is it this difference in terms of a moral philosophy that structures each position in the debate and the seemingly intractable divisions between feminists on the question of sexual politics and 'liberation'.

In order to clarify each of these elements of the relation between authenticity and autonomy I will address the arguments raised by early second wave, radical and pluralist feminists. Each of the three feminist perspectives is discussed in relation to:

(i)   its broad view of the proper relationship between feminism and a project for sexual liberation;

(ii)   an analysis of the relationship between sex and power; and

(iii)   the political and ethical considerations that are deemed appropriate in women's sexual lives.

The Politics of Orgasm: 'Seeking Liberated Sex'[12]

> The goal of revolution would be a permissive single standard of sexual freedom (Millet, 1972:62).

A Feminist Sexual Revolution?

It is commonly argued that the 'second wave' of feminism developed during the 1960s out of the counter-cultural movements of students, the Left and the 'sexual revolution'. In some respects early feminism shared aspects of these political movements, but at the same time it rejected what was seen as their pervasive sexism. For most early feminists, the sixties were seen not only as offering women new opportunities for exploring sexual 'freedom' but also showing the limits of those freedoms, defined as they largely were through patriarchal notions

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12.   This phrase comes from Lynne Segal's claim that women of her generation (who were first politically active in the 1960s in counter-culture movements and then the women's movement of the seventies) moved from 'seeing sex *as* liberation, to seeking *liberated sex*' (Segal, 1994:30 - my emphasis).

of sex. Lynne Segal, writing of this time, argues that, notwithstanding the dangers associated with sexual practice for women, feminists began to take their own sexuality and capacity for sexual pleasure seriously. In true Reichian fashion, they saw in the sexual satisfactions they gained a chance for more power in the world (Segal, 1987:76). Accordingly early feminists saw no *necessary* contradiction between women's liberation and sexual liberation. Indeed a full and radical women's liberation demanded liberation from the sexual double standard and men's control of the sexual sphere. With the advent of the contraceptive pill and other more reliable forms of contraception women were also offered the promise, if not the actuality, of a severance in the troublesome connection between sex and conception.

Advocacy of women's sexual liberation can be found in the pioneering work of Kate Millet (1972), Shulamith Firestone (1971) and Germaine Greer (1971). Kate Millet provided a 'hypothetical definition' of the sexual revolution that required the abolition of the institution of patriarchy and the sexual inhibitions that upheld it. This required the elimination of the prohibitions against 'homosexuality, "illegitimacy", adolescent, pre- and extra-marital sexuality'. More positively, she stated that the goal of sexual revolution was 'a permissive single standard of sexual freedom' (Millet, 1972:62). Similarly Shulamith Firestone in *The Dialectic of Sex* argued that a full and 'natural' sexual freedom would be possible once the feminist revolution destroyed the distinctions between men and women. A technological revolution that eliminated women's association with reproduction would allow sexuality to be freed from repression. Women and children would find themselves in a position to 'do whatever they wish to do sexually ... In our new society, humanity could finally revert to its *natural polymorphous sexuality* - all forms of sexuality would be allowed and indulged' (Firestone, 1971:209 - my emphasis). Germaine Greer supported this general view and argued that:

> The sexual personality is basically *anti-authoritarian*. If the system wishes to enforce complete suggestibility in its subjects, it will have to tame sex. Masters and Johnson supplied the blueprint for standard, low-agitation, cool-out monogamy. If women are to avoid this last reduction of their humanity, they must hold out not just for orgasm but for *ecstasy* (Greer, 1971:44 - my emphasis).

These feminists, and others,[13] did not deny the workings of male power in sexual relations - indeed that is what separates them from the purely libertarian calls for 'free sex for all'. However, they held to a view that where sex was consensual and not unduly constrained by structural male power, then the pursuit of sexual pleasure was no bad thing. Indeed it was a *right* owed to women by virtue of their equal humanity alongside men, an important component of which is the possibility and desire for sexual pleasure in a capacity equal to that of men. This recognition by feminists that women's sexuality had been denied them led to the view that women must explore sexuality for themselves.   In this process clitoral stimulation in the quest for orgasm came to be hailed by many feminists as the best means by which women might experience sexual pleasure - in essence a 'politics of orgasm' was developed. Anne Koedt's now famous essay 'The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm' (1970) provided an important rallying cry for many feminists who were not content to wait until after the revolution for their sexual pleasures.[14] This politics of orgasm, which typified the early feminist engagement with sexual liberation, incorporated a particular view of the female subject, including her relationship to 'sex', the body and gender and an ethical/political stance that was based on a liberal conceptualisation of consent. Here I will focus on Koedt's work as paradigmatic of this early feminist position.

The Politics of Orgasm: The Body and its Limits

For feminists writing in the seventies, the question of women's authentic sexuality centred around the *similarities* between male and female sexuality. The clitoris was seen as the seat of sexual pleasure and orgasm the height of sexual expression. Koedt first distributed her essay 'The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm' as a four paragraph statement at the first national Women's Liberation Conference in the USA in 1968. In praise of the orgasm, Koedt and many other feminists, drew on the work of William Masters and Virginia Johnson. These feminists were generally supportive of the idea promulgated by Masters and Johnson, that male and female sexuality were fundamentally the same. The clitoris and penis were

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13.   See also articles in *Sisterhood is Powerful* (Morgan, 1970) for other examples of the early feminist position. Segal (1992:1-41) provides a cautiously positive view of these early feminists, and Jeffreys (1990: 227-239) gives a trenchant radical feminist critique of the idea of women's sexual liberation.

14.   Other feminists writing at this time also made pleas for a 'politics of orgasm' - see for example Frick (1973), Shulman (1971) and Seaman (1973).

understood as being functionally equivalent organs and both were seen as the seat of orgasmic release. What stopped women from having their fair share of orgasms was patriarchal control of female sexuality. The goal for women therefore was to learn how to express their authentic, clitoral sexuality. Feminists departed from Masters and Johnson by going beyond the idea that the marital couple should be the locus of sexual therapy. Rather they asserted that women should take control over their own sexuality - sometimes in the context of collective workshops (Segal, 1994:39). For example, through her book, *Liberating Masturbation*, American artist Betty Dodson gave a proseltyzing and popular slant to these arguments and focused on the benefits of masturbation for women in the pursuit of orgasm. In Britain, Dodson's ideas were picked up by Ann Hooper in her workshops for women who had trouble having orgasms.[15]

Koedt's dismissal of the vaginal orgasm was based upon Masters and Johnson's laboratory experiments first published in *Human Sexual Response* (1966). In this work, the similarities between men's and women's sexual response were emphasised and the clitoris was identified as the trigger for women's sexual pleasure. Koedt took this idea and turned it to the feminist project. She viewed the body, with its physiological capacities for arousal and orgasm, as an underlying somatic reality that for most women has become repressed and distorted through patriarchal ideology. Koedt argued that once the true nature of women's sexuality (residing as it does in the appropriate stimulation of the clitoris) is recognised, women will be freed from the patriarchal trappings of sex as it is commonly experienced. One means by which women can learn this 'clitoral truth'[16] and reach sexual potency is through masturbation. Koedt went so far as to suggest that the vagina was almost completely insensitive and therefore of no interest as an erotic centre for women. An early critique of this position is found in Jill Johnston's *Lesbian Nation* (cited in Jeffreys, 1990:232). Johnston took issue with this idea arguing that she had never found her vagina insensitive to non-penile forms of penetration. Similarly Germaine Greer (1971:42), while seeing that 'the

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15. Hooper later published her ideas about these workshops for women in the book *The Body Electric: A Unique Account of Sex Therapy for Women* (1980). The politics of orgasm may have had its heyday in the early seventies but a similar focus can still be found in many women's magazines.

16. A phrase taken from Segal (1994:34).

banishment of the fantasy of the vaginal orgasm is ultimately a service' for women, lamented the 'clitoromania' that replaced the idea of the vaginal orgasm. 'Real gratification is not enshrined in a tiny cluster of nerves but in the sexual involvement of the whole person. ... If we localize female response in the clitoris we impose upon women the same limitation of sex which has stunted the male's response' (Greer, 1971:43).

These early critiques of the insensitive vagina and centrality of the clitoris to female sexuality point to a more general problem with viewing the sexual body as primarily physical. Lynne Segal argues that sexuality in analyses like that of Koedt, come to be 'understood simply as physical response to physical stimulation. In this individualistic psychology ,sexual liberation is not about social relations or subjective experience, but about individual sensation' (Segal, 1983:34). The problem is two-fold. Firstly there is an inadequate understanding of the relationship between the body and the social. Secondly, such a perspective employs an overly individualistic, and hence insufficiently relational account of sexual meaning. On the first issue, the politics of orgasm tends towards an account of sexual pleasure that is biologically reductionist. It pays scant attention to the issues raised in Chapter Two in relation to the intimate interconnection of the 'symbolic and kinetic, social and bodily' (Connell, 1995b:54). The individualism of the politics of orgasm is related to the first point. The emphasis on individual women gaining their orgasm through clitoral stimulation, neglects the importance of the relational and emotional aspects of sex with another person.

On the basis of the physical evidence about the primacy of the clitoris in female sexuality Koedt went on to argue that there was therefore a fundamental challenge to the idea that women should engage in intercourse with men. Physically men are expendable - orgasm for women does not rely on vaginal intercourse. 'The establishment of clitoral orgasm as fact would threaten the heterosexual *institution*. For it would indicate that sexual pleasure was obtainable from either men *or* women, thus making heterosexuality not an absolute, but an option' (Koedt, 1995:342). While Koedt, like most of her contemporaries, did not make the leap to prescribing lesbianism for women as a solution to male power, she did allow the

possibility of sexual practices other than heterosexuality.[17] However, the way in which this position is developed has the effect of reducing heterosexuality to a *practice* (penile intercourse) and it ignores the troubling question of women's *desire* for men. For example Wendy Hollway is critical of what she sees as a rather lame account where 'the sensation of a full vagina' is offered as one of the (lesser) pleasures of penetration. She argues that this:

> is as theoretically clueless as it is politically inadequate. How impersonal can you get! If that were the case, we may as well put something else in there. What about the experience of having someone you love and want inside you? If there is safety, trust and love in the relationship, having the man's penis inside your vagina can signify as the ultimate in closeness. It breaches the separation from another, which is symbolized by the separation of our bodies and this breach can allow early infantile desires for connectedness to be expressed and find temporary gratification (Hollway, 1993:413-414).

In summary then, early feminists worked with a notion of women's authentic sexuality as being like men's in that it was situated in the genitals. In particular the clitoris was viewed as the body organ that afforded women the most sexual pleasure. Therefore, it was to clitoral orgasms that women should look for the fulfillment of their sexual desires. This view of sex is unitary and reductive. It ignores the way in which the experience of sex is a complex set of interconnections between the bodily dimension, emotions and the actions and responses of other desired individuals. Female sexuality is reduced to a narrow, denarrativised, and monological notion of clitoral orgasm. Where sexual power is recognised, the mechanisms by which it might work through women's lives and thereby shape sexual desires and identities is left extremely vague and only a general reference is made to 'patriarchal society'. Such an account of the relationship between sex and power is highly decontextualised and minimalistic.

Sexual Freedom as Equality: Political and Ethical Dimensions

The early feminist understanding of male and female sexuality as resting on a common biological essence led to a politics that focused on women gaining *equal access* (alongside men) to sexual pleasures and an ethical stance that highlighted *consent* as the minimum requirement for free and autonomous sex. Such a politics of sexual equality was based upon

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17.   This question of sexual orientation and link to men's sexual power is one that later radical feminists have explored and will be examined in more detail in the next section.

an understanding of the power of the orgasm, clearly a reminder of the significance that Reichian ideas about sex and repressive power had for many sixties and early seventies feminists. However, as Segal suggests, having orgasms 'does not mean that we have learned to love ourselves, does not give us power over our partners, does not give us power in the world. Indeed it has little to do with either love or power. [...] Orgasms are never going to be enough, however autonomously we might control them' (Segal, 1994:44).

The recognition that patriarchal power acted to repress women's access to sexual pleasures was largely understood in liberal terms. The female body possesses the capacity for sexual pleasure that becomes possible once the correct technique is used. Once women recognise this capacity they can choose to exercise it in relationships with men, or with women, or by themselves. The underlying ethic is a minimal one of consent. There is some recognition that structural constraints, such as patriarchal marriage and women's family obligations, might affect women's ability to pursue sexual equality. However, consent remains the central ethical norm. If women agree to certain sexual practices, then they should not be unduly constrained from partaking of them. Autonomy, as self-determination, is valued over solidarity and mutuality. What matters is the *exercise of free choice* - a procedural matter rather than one of substantive ethical guidelines.

While heterosexuality was largely taken for granted as the context in which most sexual relationships should occur, the politics of orgasm encouraged an approach focusing on 'masturbation rather than *engagement with men* as the heart of heterosexual pleasure and desire' (Segal, 1992:81 - my emphasis). Sexual equality with men was based on the idea of *sameness* with men, which in turn contributed to the idea that women were a *unified category*. Difference within the category of woman was ignored. It was assumed that because all women share the same kind of body, therefore they all benefit from a politics focusing on equality. Moreover, a debased understanding of authenticity reduced sexuality to a single standard of somatic reality based around the clitoris. In addition to the notion of men's and women's sameness leading to an ethic focusing on consent, the politics of orgasm led to an ethics in which the goal of sex is essentially pleasure. Communication, intimacy, and love (except for self-love) received little recognition.

Radical Feminism: Critiquing Heterosexuality, Eroticising Equality

> The question we have to ask ourselves is whether we want our freedom or whether we want to retain heterosexual desire. Feminists will choose freedom (Jeffreys, 1990:314).

Sexual Liberation as Patriarchal Plot

If early feminists paid insufficient attention to the question of the power inherent in heterosexual relations, radical and cultural feminists have taken that question and the general problem of sexual danger and made these issues central to their views about sexual liberation. In the previous section, I suggested that most of the early second wave feminist commentaries on sexual liberation were generally supportive of some kind of feminist sexual revolution. However, there have always been feminists who saw in calls for sexual revolution only the exercise of male power.[18] In one of the most cogent and fully worked through accounts of the radical feminist rejection of sexual liberation, Sheila Jeffreys argues that '"sexual liberation" [is] the freedom for women to take pleasure from their own eroticised subordination' (Jeffreys, 1990:1).[19] For Jeffreys, and other radical feminists, there can be no *rapprochement* between feminism and sexual liberation. These political projects are viewed as being mutually exclusive. Therefore, for feminists to advocate sexual liberation is to choose sex over freedom. 'Sexual liberation is not the liberation of women, but the liberation of the female *sex-object,* which is now expected to orgasm' (Kappeler, 1986:160 - my emphasis).

For radical feminists, the question of sexual pleasure is likened to epiphenomena. Pleasure will only be possible once the underlying structural base of women's oppression is addressed. Hence, Sheila Jeffreys expresses surprise that feminists interested in sexuality would fixate on pleasure when sexual danger and oppression is everywhere so rampant. She explains it with a metaphor: 'An issue of housing would not be expected to focus on interior decoration at the expense of looking at homelessness' (Jeffreys, 1990:264). Similarly Catharine

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18.   For example Ti-Grace Atkinson (1974).

19.   Jeffreys also mounts an impassioned critique of sexology, the sexual revolution of the sixties and gay liberation. See also *The Lesbian Heresy: A Feminist Perspective on the Lesbian Sexual Revolution* (1994).

MacKinnon makes a comparison between sexuality and work. Work is:

> an exploitative process through which value is created; and through that process,
> people are constructed as members of classes. This does not mean that no worker
> never has a good day or nobody has fulfilling work. It does not mean that there is no
> such thing as "my work", or that opposition to the class structure in which people
> struggle out forms of fulfillment is impossible. It just means that it is *never not there*
> (MacKinnon, 1992:132).

Thus, radical feminists base their rejection of sexual liberation on the grounds that it is a
political ploy by men to further their sexual power over women. Of all the 'radical' forms
of politics sexual liberation is particularly problematic for radical feminists because they see
sexuality as the central *foundation* of women's oppression. An expression of that position
is found in Kathleen Barry's equation of the sexual system with female slavery. In *Female
Sexual Slavery* Barry argues that '*sex is power* is the foundation of patriarchy' (Barry,
1984:413 - original emphasis). However, it is the work of Catharine MacKinnon that has
come to be seen as paradigmatic of the view that 'sexuality is the primary social sphere of
male power' (MacKinnon, 1982:529).

For MacKinnon 'the social relation between the sexes is organised so that men may dominate
and women must submit and this relation is sexual - in fact, is sex' (MacKinnon, 1987:3).
From this perspective gender relations are sexual relations - in a patriarchal society sexuality
and gender are the same things - the site of female oppression. 'Women and men are divided
by gender, made into the sexes as we know them, by the social requirements of
heterosexuality, which institutionalises male sexual dominance and female sexual submission.
If this is true, sexuality is the lynchpin of gender inequality'(MacKinnon, 1982:533). From
the radical feminist perspective, then, the question of women's authentic sexuality is situated
in the context of a heterosexual system that constructs male and female sexual difference in
such a way that male sexuality is exploitative of female sexuality. Unlike earlier feminists,
radical feminists do not seek the recognition of women's *similarity* and therefore *equality*
with men, but highlight that gendered sexual difference is an evaluative difference between
dominant and dominated categories of people. Radical feminists seek recognition of
women's authentic *intimacy-focused* sexuality and protection from male sexual power. The
corresponding ethical stance is one that rejects difference in sexual relations because
difference is equated with division and power. Ironically, radical feminists turn to a position

in which an erotic equality is sought.

Other radical feminists[20] have also explored further the idea that heterosexuality is an *institution* that is at the base of women's oppression. Moreover, heterosexuality is viewed as the foundation of all other oppressions, because it 'is based on and justified by the concept of difference' (Jeffreys, 1990:297). Heterosexuality is constructed both through force and other more subtle means, and its principal aim is to prevent the bonding of women which would allow them to overthrow men and their system of power (Jeffreys, 1990:299).

Sex, Power and Subjectivity

For radical feminists, patriarchal control of the sexual system constructs 'sexuality' (i.e. erotic preferences and practices) in such a way that it is gendered. Male and female sexuality take very different forms. These gender differences are based upon male control of the sexual system. Hence male sexuality:

> as a ruling class sexuality ... is constructed around the fact that they have a subordinate class on whom to act sexually. Women are that subordinate class. The elements that constitute male sexuality depend upon the possession of ruling class status such as objectification, aggression, and the separation of sex from loving emotion (Jeffreys, 1990:237).

Further, men are oriented to bodily pleasures that are genitally centred. This male sexuality is therefore responsible for rape, the pornographic objectification of women, child sexual abuse, male-centred forms of sexual pleasure and the suppression of female sexual autonomy. In addition, it is the basis for men's oppression of women in the domestic and public spheres. The sexual sphere that constructs male sexuality is also responsible for constructing a subordinated female sexuality that serves men's desires. Women come to accept as 'natural', modes of sexual relating that are oppressive, though they are often not recognised as such because women's consciousness has been formed through ideology.

Nonetheless, radical feminists also want to argue that there is a 'core' or authentic female sexuality that is 'really' something other than the patriarchal construction. This female sexuality is understood as the polar opposite to male sexuality. Where men are aggressive -

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20.   For example, Leeds Revolutionary Feminist Group (1980) Janice Raymond (1986) Sheila Jeffreys (1990) and Margaret Jackson (1994).

women are the objects of that aggression, and more naturally peaceful. Male genital focus is compared to women's more diffuse whole-body eroticism. Where men are self-centred, women are other-centred. Women are more interested in love than orgasms. However, this normative view of what female sexuality *really* is runs into difficulty because radical feminists situate female sexuality as part of the total system that is 'sexuality'. Hence for radical feminists, women who argue that they are able to express their own authentic desires (for orgasms or s/m or heterosexual penetrative sex for example) are being disingenuous or, at the very least, they are deluded - suffering from a form of false consciousness. This points to an important, complex and much contested theoretical issue concerning the nature of sexual desires and practices and how they come to be part of individual repertoires and subjectivity. Typically, this issue has been framed as the question of the 'social construction of sexuality'.

Radical feminists, for their part, have been critical of what they see as the liberal individualism of those positions (including feminist ones) that argue that women can, and do, freely choose the sexual practices they want. For the radical feminist, a focus on individual choice and consent neglects the profound and overdetermining effect of (hetero)sexuality as a structure of oppression. What is clear from these radical feminist perspectives, is that the equality lauded by some feminists is an impossibility under conditions of patriarchy. For example, when Catharine MacKinnon was asked to clarify her view that 'it is impossible to have equality in heterosexual sex' she elaborated in the following way:

> I regard those who say that they have sex under conditions of equality somewhat the way I regard those who tell me they have never been discriminated against. My initial reaction is, I am really happy for you; my next reaction is, maybe you are missing something; my final reaction is, just wait. The truth is that women and men experience sexuality under conditions of inequality between the sexes. Gender is a division of power; sexuality in my argument, is a dynamic in that (MacKinnon, 1992:132).

Radical feminists explain that it is not women's 'free' choice that is being exercised when they participate in unhealthy, male-defined practices, rather it is the result of being born into 'cultural sadism'. Women's experience of sexual pleasure within heterosexual relationships is explained as an *accommodation* of their selves to patriarchy (Jeffreys, 1990:304). Sheila Jeffreys argues that because women are born into a system of subordination, and not of

equality, they do not possess equality to eroticise. 'We are born into subordination and it is in subordination that we learn our sexual and emotional responses. It would be surprising indeed if any woman reared under male supremacy was able to escape the forces constructing her into a member of an inferior slave class' (Jeffreys, 1990:302).

There are three interconnected problems with this radical feminist version of social constructionism. Firstly, there is a problematic totalising of male sexual power that does not adequately address the complex relational setting in which sexuality is constructed, enacted and challenged. Secondly, there is little recognition of the contradictions or lack of fit between sexual scripts and real men and women in actual interactions. Finally the normative view articulated by radical feminists of an oppressive heterosexual system, 'bad' male sexuality and 'good' female sexuality assumes that a non-repressed social order would be more homogeneous than the plurality of human sexuality and life would suggest.

When radical feminists utilise a totalistic view of men's (sexual) power they argue that it is only outside the institution of sexuality/heterosexuality that women have any hope of sexual freedom. There is an assumption that sexuality/power are co-terminous with society. There is no outside of this system. Moreover, this system is seamless. It is patriarchal in all its elements. Women are victims, men are oppressors. This view of social relations has come under sustained attack by socialist and black feminists, as well as in critical social theory. I will not rehearse those arguments here, except to say that rather than seeing society as a totality it may be more useful to return to the notion of 'relational setting' introduced in Chapter Two.

> A relational setting is a pattern of relationships among institutions, pubic narratives, and social practices. As such it is a relational matrix, similar to a social network. ... a relational setting has a history and thus must be explored over time and space. A relational setting is traced over time ... by empirically examining if and when relational interactions among narratives and institutions appear to have produced a decisively different outcome from previous ones. [...] Spatially, a relational setting ... is composed of a matrix of instititutions linked to each other in variable patterns contingent on the interaction of all points in the matrix (Somers and Gibson, 1994:70-1).

Such a view of 'society' does not deny the 'patriarchal' nature of aspects of social relations, but it attempts to understand these in the context of a whole range of other social relations

that are contextually relevant. The question has to be asked whether sexuality is really the most significant means by which men secure their dominance over women. If the answer to that question is no, then perhaps sexual freedom, of some kind is still a legitimate and achievable goal for feminists.

The second aspect of the totalistic view of power is that radical feminists see men and women, equally, learning their appropriate 'sexual scripts'. There is little recognition of the fact that such scripts may be neither as strong, nor as extensive, as believed.

> Do all men and women "learn" their social scripts quite so successfully, and in exactly the same way? ... Do boys never encounter ideas linking "masculinity" to "love", "romance" and "relationships"? Have the girls yet to see, and hear, Madonna's sexually assertive, if polymorphously perverse, appearance, sound, lyrics and movement (Segal, 1992:74).

There is now a growing literature which highlights that, for some men at least, the masculine sexual script is not so singularly constructed around notions of aggression, superiority, and dominance as radical feminists suggest (see for example Hall, 1991; and Connell, 1995b) Bodily masculinity is precarious. And in the context of debates about pornography, Lynne Segal questions the equation of the phallus (that is the sacred sign of male power in pornography) with the small and fragile object that is the penis. 'Against feminist anti-pornography discourse on the power and danger of male sexual domination, it is crucial to emphasize how the phallus as a symbol functions primarily to hide, as well as to create and sustain, the severe anxieties and fears attached to the penis' (Segal, 1992:83). Therefore the seemingly 'empowering' nature of pornography for men, may be more complex and contradictory than radical feminists are prepared to accept.

Radical feminists, however, find it difficult to recognise these points because of their adherence to an unquestioned normative definition of good and bad sex. This structures their analysis of the scope of patriarchal sexual control. Ironically, radical feminists therefore share the same analytical problem that Keat (1986) highlighted about Reich's views of repression. Radical feminists identify a 'natural' female sexuality (whole-body eroticism and primarily 'intimate' mode of sexual relating) with a non-patriarchal sphere. This sexuality is not non-social but exists in the absence of patriarchal control. However, it could be argued that in a non-patriarchal mode (in Reich's case the sphere of non-repression) there is more

heterogeneity than radical feminists allow. Keat made the point in relation to Reich, but I think it applies equally well here - 'within this heterogeneity there will be a good number of *normatively relevant differentiations* to be made' (Keat, 1986:29 - original emphasis). Radical feminism is ill-equipped to accept this, given the equation of heterosexuality with difference, and difference with power (male, white, capitalist and so on). In this schema difference itself is bad because it is power-laden. For radical feminists the elimination of difference appears to be the only solution to the problem of power. A radical feminist monism rejects any kind of sexual pluralism.

Whereas for seventies feminists, sex is an activity principally concerned with the expression of pleasure, radical feminists see sexuality as primarily about 'bonding and communicating emotion' (Ferguson, 1989:149). Radical feminists reject the search for equality with men in the sexual sphere. They argue that to pursure equality *with men* simply reinforces patriarchal power over women. The idea that women and men are the same in terms of their sexuality leads to a situation where women's *specific* needs are neglected in favour of male desires for hedonistic, pleasure-oriented sex. Therefore, radical feminists turn to a valorisation of women's difference from men and work on the basis of male/female sexual difference being a matter of metaphysics rather than substance and contextual location. This contributes to the construction of an interconnected politics and ethics. Radical feminists develop a form of identity politics that highlights the politics of the personal. This form of politics is linked with an ethics of intimacy in which 'homosexual desire' is the epitome of the eroticisation of equality.

'The Personal is Political' and Eroticising Equality

Radical feminist sexual politics, with its recognition of fundamental differences between male and female sexuality, requires 'both a radical critique of sex as it is defined and constructed within a patriarchal society, and a commitment to working out our own model based on *mutual interchange between equals* and on *pleasure without objectification*' (Jackson, 1994:186 - my emphasis). There is therefore, a two-pronged approach to politics. Firstly there is a vigorous *rejection of male sexual values* wherever they occur, whether it is in men's pornography and sexual practice or in libertarian feminist celebration of s/m. This

strategy entails a project of *censoring and inhibiting* lustful men (Seidman, 1992:105) and reconstructing male sexuality in order 'to sever the link between power and aggression and sexual pleasure. Only then can women be relieved of the restrictions placed upon their lives and opportunities by male sexual objectification and aggression' (Jeffreys, 1990:313). These strategies are at the centre of radical feminist campaigns against pornography and male sexual violence. Secondly there is a quest for *women's security* through the construction of female solidarity in supportive feminist and lesbian communities. Freedom lies not in exercising free choice, but in recognising the distortions of patriarchy, rooting out those distortions of the self, and replacing these with a form of sexuality that 'eroticises equality' in a context of intimate, solidaristic connections. Therefore, alongside campaigns *against* patriarchal forms of sexuality, radical feminists (particularly lesbian feminists) want to secure the public *recognition of identities* that 'foster self-respect and pride' (Phelan, 1989:4).

Patriarchal society is understood to have distorted women's sexuality and at the same time to have denied women self-respect. Radical feminists are critical of those forms of feminist politics that emphasise equality and focus on women's autonomous choice as the fundamental value. In privileging choice, these feminists are accused of a liberal individualism that is blind to the structural constraints on women's lives. In place of an ethic of autonomy (as self-determination), radical feminists encourage women to think of themselves as members of an oppressed community. Freedom, therefore, does not lie in an individualistic search for the pleasures one desires, rather there is a focus on recognising what women share (in terms of the good values of empathy, care for the other etc), and eradicating those desires that are patriarchal in origin.

In the pursuit of this freedom, radical feminists emphasise the close connection between the personal and the political. This recognition of the connection between seemingly individualised and private lives and the public world of real politics has undoubtedly been an important feminist argument. However, some versions of radical feminism collapse the personal and the political into each other. They are no longer separate spheres. The personal is political all the way down and as such it requires feminists to be constantly attentive to the workings of power in all aspects of their lives, and moreover to make of their lives a political

statement. It follows, then, that an influential strand of radical feminism supports the idea that women should express their commitment to other women and against the patriarchy by forming sexual relationships with each other. To continue to sleep with men reveals heterosexual women 'as torn, half-hearted victims not entirely to be trusted' (Phelan, 1989:49). Freedom therefore entails women learning how to distinguish between what has been foisted upon them by patriarchy and what is a more appropriate women-centred sexuality. Sheila Jeffreys has taken this idea and suggested that freedom comes with the construction of *homosexual* desire. She argues that even though women live in a heterosexual system, they have still, at some time, experienced some form of sexual desire that 'does not leave us feeling betrayed, a sexual desire and practice which eroticises mutuality and equality' (Jeffreys, 1990:313). In getting to this place women need to develop skills for evaluating sexual experience. Jeffreys suggests that by listening to their feelings women will be able to work out what is positive and what is negative. 'The negative feelings are about eroticised subordination or heterosexual desire' (Jeffreys, 1990:305).

In order to pursue this freedom, it is necessary to identify some kind of independent and autonomous self that can recognise internalised patriarchal desires and remove these so that more authentic ones can be expressed. The difficulty arises for radical feminists in explaining *how* women can articulate such a critical consciousness in a system that is so thoroughly saturated with patriarchal power. As indicated above, Jeffreys suggests this is possible through women training themselves to listen carefully to their feelings. She argues that negative feelings will be connected to patriarchal sexuality, positive feelings to mutuality. Those feminists or women who claim that they have authentic desires for s/m or heterosexual penetration and so on, are suffering from a false consciousness. If only they would listen more closely to their feelings they would be able to identify such desires for what they really are - the inauthentic products of 'eroticised subordination'. In making this kind of argument, radical feminists rely 'on "a self-refuting claim to transcendence"; it does not, cannot explain why *their consciousness* is more privileged than that of their opponents' (Phelan, 1989:118 - my emphasis). By making the radical feminist normative view on sex the ultimate authority, feminists such as Jeffreys display what Benhabib (1986) calls the 'transsubjective perspective' of the 'thinker-observer' who stands apart from lived social relations.

This approach also reflects an expressivist form of action in which an atomised *self-realisation* is the central value of life. By seeking recourse to 'inner feelings', and expressing those 'positive' ones not associated with patriarchy, radical feminists fall prey to a view of consciousness based on a monological model of action. In such a model subject-object relations are abstracted from their social context and the other is reduced to an object - not another self. Benhabib is critical of this form of consciousness because it reflects a philosophy of the subject that 'denies the dimensions of *plurality* and *indeterminacy* which are constitutive of human action' (Benhabib, 1986:104). In the expressivist model, feelings are located *within* individuals and reported to those outside. This assumes that individuation precedes sociation and so ignores the crucial role that interaction and communication play in determining meaning. Benhabib argues that at the heart of human action there is an interpretive indeterminacy and plurality. Interpretive indeterminacy refers to the fact that feelings and intentions can only be understood through a process of social interpretation and communication in a shared world (Benhabib, 1986:136). Moreover radical feminists with their totalistic view of patriarchy, and presentation of lesbianism as a solution, have little space for the plurality of *social* forms of sexuality, and the diversity that might exist *within* the individual. In the notion of political lesbianism, then, radical feminists concur with the expressivist view of the conservative establishment that 'sexuality is expressive of social being' (Phelan, 1989:50).

In addition to the expressivism of this form of feminist sexual identity politics there is an assumption of a fairly uniform understanding of 'women' and/or 'lesbian'. Because sexuality/gender is the foundational structuring principle of society, other differences, while not to be ignored altogether, are relegated to a secondary status. It is possible therefore to argue that the radical feminist views of gendered and sexual identity are 'categorical' in nature. They are based on the assumption that all women share similar life-experiences and act on the grounds of their common attributes. The categorisation of a universal *'women's sexual identity'* abstracts from the much more complex and nuanced interactions and relationships in which identities are actually negotiated (Calhoun, 1994:26). Whereas Janice Raymond may want to proudly, and with certainty claim 'we know who we are', what this form of identity politics does is to fall into a kind of 'in-group essentialism' in which opposing

voices from within the category are ignored or castigated for not being feminist or lesbian enough. Radical feminists do not adequately address the fact that identities are *lived* and as such 'identity is always project, not settled accomplishment' (Calhoun, 1994:27). It is therefore useful to think of identity, not as categorical, but rather as narrative (Somers and Gibson, 1994:57). As suggested in the previous chapter, this idea refers to an understanding of identity as being constructed in the context of interrelated relations of time, place and power. From this perspective 'people are guided to act by the structural and cultural relationships in which they are embedded and by the *stories* through which they constitute their identities' (Somers, 1994:624). The radical feminist unitary category of women, therefore does scant justice to the complexity of women's lives.

When radical feminists turn to the question of sexual ethics they construct a view of sex as being ideally focused on mutuality, eroticising equality, and the expression of intimacy and love. Sexual acts should therefore possess the qualities of intimacy and care for the other. The 'dialectic of intimacy' is therefore expressed in sex through gentle, nurturing, non-objectifying, person-centred (as opposed to body-centred) acts. This ethic is clearly a substantive one, opposed to the more procedural ethics of those feminisms that focus on choice and consent. While there are certainly gains to be made in sexual ethics by moving from a procedural to a substantive rationality, the precise substance of this radical feminist ethics is problematic in several important respects. For example, Carol Bacchi has suggested that where radical feminists focus on a dichotomous view of men as uncontrollable and dangerous, and women as being concerned with values of caring, they 'fall into the trap of leaving women responsible for the world's caring values in much the same way as the ancient *Gemeinschaft* tradition counted on women's altruism to service the family and community' (Bacchi, 1990:218). In place of a radical feminist ethic that locates caring and intimacy in female values and actions, Bacchi suggests that there is a danger 'in designating women as the ones responsible for congealing the social order. To repeat a theme, we need a model which recognises people's interdependence without appointing women the carers' (Bacchi, 1990:227).

There is also a problem in the radical feminist valorisation of female-relatedness and connectedness. There may be a tyranny associated with an expectation of harmony amongst 'community-members'. An ethic of care may degenerate into the obliteration of the autonomy of others (Weeks, 1995:179) by assuming that the needs of the self and the other are mutually inclusive. Some women's needs will undoubtedly be denied and the legitimate drive for community may degenerate into 'unmediated unity, a unity that carries as its twin an excessive fear of difference' (Phelan, 1989:57). Differences which may exist 'out there' in other women, or within ourselves as perhaps 'inauthentic desires' are seen as being incompatible with the ideology of romanticism that runs through radical feminist sexual ethics.

This ideology of romanticism informs the radical feminist notion that true sexual freedom, which is to be distinguished from the project of 'sexual liberation', comes in the form of eroticising equality and pursuing mutuality, a possibility residing only in lesbian relationships (Stock, 1990:154).[21] The precise nature of this sexual freedom is not well-developed. Indeed, it often appears only as an afterthought to the analysis of the truly overwhelming fact of sexual danger. While Jeffreys had previously rejected *equality with men,* she wants to retain the concept of equality in relation to the construction of 'homosexual desire'. This is not equality with men (as they are currently constructed) but desire for 'sameness' i.e. women's desire for women. Jeffreys (1990:315) warns us that we might not recognise 'homosexual desire' as sex because it is so different from what passes for sex in patriarchal relations.[22] Sameness, equality and mutuality are to be eroticised but this entails the collapsing of distinctions between friendship, love and sex.

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21.   Some feminists go further, however, by arguing that the only practical political choice open for women under conditions of patriarchy is to give up *all* forms of sexual expression including lesbian sex. See for example 'A Southern Women's Writing Collective' (1990:146).

22.   She also notes that heterosexual desire may still exist in homosexual relationships because of power differences between individuals.

Pluralist Feminism: Promoting Pleasures, Critiquing Cultural Feminism

> Feminism must speak to sexual pleasure as a *fundamental right*, which cannot be put off to a better or easier time. It must understand that the women to whom it speaks, and those it hopes to reach, care deeply about sexual pleasure and displeasure in their daily lives; that sexuality is a domain of struggle - visceral, engaging, riveting [...] Feminism should encourage women to resist not only coercion and victimization, but also sexual ignorance, deprivation and *fear of difference* (Vance, 1984c:24 - my emphasis).

The Precarious Balancing Act Between Pleasure and Danger

Contemporary pluralist feminism shares many of the social, political and ethical positions of the seventies feminist engagement with sexual liberation. For example Snitow et al (1984:19) are impressed by Anne Koedt's work because she:

> suggested possibilities for a female-controlled sexuality. Her ideas, however limited, helped women to decrease their dependence on men, increase their sexual autonomy, improve the odds that they would obtain pleasure from sex, and find through that pleasure not a new level of subjugation but an affirmation of identity and power.

Pluralist feminism therefore shares with this earlier feminist position a *politics of sexual liberation* concerned with resisting the illegitimate thwarting of desire. This perspective is clearly at odds with a radical feminist *politics of sexism* in which sexuality is seen as being primarily imposed on, and constituted for women through fear, violence and degradation. For pluralist feminists however the sufferings of desire are not to be under-rated. They merit at least as much attention as the sufferings of danger that are at the forefront of the radical feminist agenda.

Pluralist feminism developed as a distinct position in the sexuality debates partly in resistance to what was seen by some as a growing radical feminist hegemony on questions of sexuality. In the interview 'Talking Sex', Dierdre English, Amber Hollibaugh and Gayle Rubin reject the idea that some forms of sexuality should be banned. They argue that radical feminists have created a discourse that does not leave much room for 'joy, power or lustiness' (English, Hollibaugh and Rubin, 1982:41).[23] Other important critiques of what was typified as a 'cultural feminist' perspective can be found in the work of Alice Echols (1984a, b) and

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23.   This interview, first published in the United States in 1981, has since become an important 'talking piece' in itself. It has been reprinted in *Feminist Review* (1982) and is often identified as being particularly pernicious by radical feminists.

Ellen Willis (1984). These authors focused on the construction of a new feminist moralism that equated men with vice (and all that is bad) and women with virtue (and hence all good things). Cultural feminism is therefore often seen as being anti-sex.[24] Alice Echols suggests that this form of feminism is complicit with a more general conservative project of 'taming the id'. She asks 'do we really want to return to the old sexual order whereby women were accorded male protection in exchange for sexual circumspection?' (Echols, 1984b:65).

As was suggested earlier the catalyst for much of the pluralist attack on cultural feminism in the United States came from the concerns articulated at the Barnard Conference and in the academic feminist texts *Pleasure and Danger*, and *Desire*. In addition there were other popular, cultural expressions of a clearly libertarian ethic in books such as the 'Sex Issue' of *Heresies*, *Coming to Power* (on lesbian s/m), *On Our Backs* (a lesbian sex magazine) and through the writings of Pat Califia (e.g. *Sapphistry*). What is common to the *academic* articulation of this pluralist perspective, is the denunciation of cultural feminism as a kind of feminist anti-sex prudism, an intellectual debt to Foucault's framing of sexuality, and a celebration of the *diversity* of sexual practices, identities and desires that women (*and* feminists) wish to, and frequently do, express.

My discussion of pluralist feminism will focus on a few key texts. In particular the edited collections *Pleasure and Danger*, and *Desire*, set the parameters of the debate and the key issues as pluralist feminists of the mid-eighties saw them. The introductions to these texts, as well as Gayle Rubin's article 'Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality' (1984) are emblematic of the pluralist feminist view on the nature of sex, its relationship to gender, and a critique of cultural feminism. Moreover these texts exemplify the pluralist feminist view on the appropriate ethical and political response of feminists and sex radicals. Rubin's article is a particularly important text because it has been so widely used by feminists trying to rethink the relationship between sex and feminism.

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24.   This distinction between anti- and pro-sex positions is also found in notions that there is a distinction between 'good girls' and 'bad girls' (Bacchi, 1990) and 'sex cops' and 'sex criminals' (Rich, 1986:528). In fact, recent radical feminist texts on sexual liberalism and sexual liberation have explicitly stated that they *are* anti-sex in the sense that 'sex' is a patriarchal production that is contrasted with a more diffuse and power-free eroticism.

A key component of the pluralist feminist approach to sexuality is to highlight the tensions that exist between sexual pleasure and sexual danger in women's lives. This was the task that the Barnard Conference set itself and that was outlined in its concept paper:

> This dual focus is important ... for to speak only of pleasure and gratification ignores the patriarchal structure in which women act, yet to talk only of sexual violence and oppression ignores women's experiences with sexual agency and choice and unwittingly increases the sexual terror and despair in which women live (Vance, 1984a:443).

In her introduction to *Pleasure and Danger*, Carole Vance argued that feminists such as herself did not want to *weaken* the critique of danger (a criticism often made by cultural feminists of libertarian feminism), but rather to *expand* the analysis of pleasure (Vance, 1984c:3). Pluralist feminists depart from cultural feminists, not by ignoring the role that sexual danger plays in women's lives, but by extending the focus onto the way that patriarchal ideology constrains women so that they have to manage their sexual desire and its public expression. 'The horrific effects of gender inequality may include not only brute violence, but the *internalized control of women's impulses*, poisoning desire at its very root with self-doubt and anxiety' (Vance, 1984c:4 - my emphasis). Pluralist feminists were also wary of the way that the cultural feminist analysis of pornography endorsed a view in which sexual desire itself became coded as male. If women take pleasure in the act of looking (a problem with pornography because of its objectification of women and sex) then they may find a new source of shaming, but this time from feminism (Vance, 1984c:6). It follows from this analysis then that one of the goals of feminism is to work towards lessening the sufferings of desire by exploring, as positive, women's diverse desires and pleasures. In this respect, then, pluralist feminists, profess an equal emphasis on pleasure and danger, yet actually focus almost exclusively on the question of sexual pleasure.

Many feminists writing within a pluralist framework recognise the tensions that exist within this perspective. They acknowledge that there is always a danger that as feminists attempt to move away from the 'self-righteous feminine censoriousness' associated with cultural feminism, they could shift into a more 'cavalier libertarianism that deals but minimally with vulnerability' (Snitow et al, 1984:31). Rosalind Coward comments that the pluralist feminist counter-position to the prescriptive approach of radical feminism, often appears to 'smack of a sort of sexual laissez-faire, a tolerance to anything and everything' (Coward, 1984:xiv).

Certainly Amber Hollibaugh in the following extract from *Pleasure and Danger* expresses both the range of pleasures that pluralist feminists want to claim for women, as well as an almost anarchic and certainly celebratory notion of sexual pleasure. She asks:

> Who are all the women who don't come gently and don't want to; don't know yet what they like but intend to find out; are the lovers of butch or femme women; who like fucking with men; practice consensual s/m; feel more like faggots than dykes; love dildoes, penetration, costumes; like to sweat, talk dirty, see expressions of need sweep across their lovers' faces; are confused and need to experiment with their own tentative ideas of passion; think gay male porn is hot; are into power? Are we creating a political movement that we can no longer belong to if we don't feel our desires fit a model of proper feminist sex? (Hollibaugh, 1984:403).

This expresses the pluralist feminist concern to go beyond the radical feminist approach - 'what men did to me around sex' (Snitow et al, 1984:20).

In the following sections I examine how pluralist feminism, particularly as exemplified by Gayle Rubin, theorises 'sexuality'. Like the radical feminists that they oppose, pluralist feminists work with a notion of some kind of 'authentic' female sexuality, e.g. 'We must start from where we are right now, from the real bodies we live in, the real desires we feel' (Hollibaugh, 1984:408). However, the two perspectives approach the question of authenticity from two very different directions. Radical feminists tend to focus on identifying *inauthentic* desires and set about eradicating these, while pluralist feminists work towards the *proliferation of pleasures* that are already present in women's experience. Pluralist feminists want to see the *expression* of a range of authentic female sexualities, while radical feminists have a more narrowly defined and unitary notion of what is authentic.

Sexuality as Relatively Autonomous and the Inescapability of Power

Where radical feminists saw the realm of sexuality as the founding structure of women's oppression, pluralist feminists take the view that although gender and sexuality are connected, they are not identical realms. Feminism is not to be accorded the privileged theory of sex:

> Feminism is the theory of gender oppression. To automatically assume that this makes it the theory of sexual oppression is to fail to distinguish between gender, on the one hand, and erotic desire, on the other ... lust and gender [are not] modalities of the same underlying social process (Rubin, 1984:307).

With this analytical distinction between sexuality and gender, pluralist feminists such as Rubin

argue that what is needed is a 'radical theory of sex' that is able to recognise the specifically *sexual* aspects of oppression. Feminism, especially as it has been developed by radical feminists, is ill-equiped to take account of all the relevant issues at stake in questions of sexuality. Rubin argues that an autonomous theory and politics of sexuality must be developed. This new radical theory of sex should include a feminist critique of gender hierarchy, but it must not be limited to feminist analytical frames (Rubin, 1984:309). A radical theory of sexuality has as its primary intention the identification, explanation and denunciation of 'erotic injustice and sexual oppression' (Rubin, 1984:275).

The most significant influence on this new radical theory of sex came from Foucault's early work on sexuality - particularly the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*. Hence pluralist feminists take issue with the radical feminist idea that patriarchal power is solely responsible for the construction of women's sexual pleasures and desires. They develop their argument through a three-pronged approach. Firstly, pluralist feminists work with a confused and ambivalent notion of the social construction of sexuality and the sexual self. Secondly, they conceptualise sexuality as a sphere of 'benign sexual variation'. Finally, they draw on Foucauldian and s/m arguments that power is ultimately not able to be eliminated from sexual relationships.

Pluralist feminists charge radical feminists with being essentialist in their discussions of sexuality. To counter this essentialism they turn to a variety of theoretical sources. In particular Foucault's view of sexuality as a domain constructed through discourse, that *produces* sexual subjects and identities, is used as a resource in pluralist feminist arguments. This use of Foucault's perspective is less directed at deconstructing patriarchal forms of knowledge about female sexuality than *against* radical feminist theory, identified as it is as essentialist and anti-pluralist. The identification of cultural feminism as the main danger, rather than patriarchal ideology, contributes to a pluralist feminist account of sexuality that is focused around Foucault's notions of 'power as resistance' rather than on the disciplinary nature of discourses of sexuality. Rubin's 1984 article is typical of this approach.

Rubin shares with Foucault the problem, discussed in Chapter Two, that her putatively

discursive account finally rests upon a 'repressive' model of power. Rubin's approach is also shaped by an interest in those on the 'sexual margins', e.g. gay and lesbian sado-masochists. This prior commitment to defending the activities of a wide range of sexual identities shapes the arguments of Rubin and other pluralist feminists (e.g. Hollibaugh). A form of sexual naturalism sneaks back in as pluralist feminists tend to assume that the sexual desires they defend are 'natural'. Moreover, this self is assumed to be fully transparent. Unlike radical feminists, pluralists tend to assume that what is 'on top' for women in relation to their sexuality is authentic and therefore automatically deserving of recognition and expression. Where radical feminists utilise a problematic concept of false consciousness, pluralist feminists rely on an equally problematic liberal conception of an autonomous transparent self that is able to define its own interests outside of its relationships with others.

While there is some equivocation amongst pluralist feminists in their explanations of how sexual subjectivities are constructed, their conceptualisation of sexual desires, identities and practices as *pluralistic* is more consistent. Rubin characterises the sexual field as one of 'benign sexual variation' and she therefore wants to side-step the question of the *etiology* of sexual desires. Instead she claims that the search for causes, whether by the psychiatric establishment or feminist moralists, ends up linked to a conservative sexual politics in which there is a search for the 'thing' that should change 'so that these "problematic" eroticisms would not occur' (Rubin, 1984:304). This approach is clearly libertarian, resting on the idea that all sexual forms of expression are *benign*. It appears that Rubin does not want to address the issue of judging which sexual acts, desires, and identities are 'good' or 'bad'. Rubin is reluctant to 'draw the line' in sexual hierarchies because of what she sees as an already overwhelming history of sex law, prejudice and persecution that has hounded 'sexual outlaws'. From a feminist perspective, this does not seem to be a satisfactory response and it has been the subject of much of the feminist critique of Foucauldian feminism.[25] While there is much to be said in favour of a careful appraisal of any approach that reinforces sexual oppression, pluralist feminism does not adequately address the ways in which patriarchal sexual ideologies damage women.

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25.   See in particular McNay (1992) and Deveaux (1994).

This reluctance to use the concept of power as a way of differentiating between authentic and inauthentic, and good and bad forms of sexual expression, can partially be accounted for by the pluralist feminist reliance on Foucault's ideas about 'power as resistance'.[26] Therefore while radical feminists are concerned to *break* the connection between sex and power, so that women might be free to experience a self-fulfilling 'erotic', pluralist feminists focus on the notion that sex and power are irredeemably linked - 'power *inheres in* sexuality... Perhaps we might achieve more equality were we to negotiate rather than deny power' (Echols, 1984b:66 - my emphasis). This Foucauldian justification for seeing sexuality and power as inseparable is joined by the discourse of s/m advocates who stress that the experience of sexual pleasure in s/m encounters is reliant on playing with the dynamics of power. Therefore, some pluralist feminists argue that analysis should be concerned with *understanding* the dynamics of domination and submission that seem to be present in some form or other within all sexual relationships, rather than trying to eliminate them from sexual practice. These theories argue that while power relations may be more explicitly codified in s/m practice and in butch-femme role-playing, they are a feature of most sexual relationships.

More significantly, for the advocates of s/m, the power-filled nature of their sexual relationships means that power can be conceptualised as an 'exchange' between equals. While the details of debates about s/m are not the focus of my discussion here, they are relevant to a broader consideration of sexual freedom, insofar as a general understanding of sexual power as a set of exchange-relations is misleading and potentially dangerous. I am persuaded by Leo Bersani's critique of s/m's declaration of its 'radical' nature.

> Yes, in S/M roles are reversible; yes in S/M enslavement is consensual; yes, as Califia puts it, S/M is "power unconnected to privilege". But this doesn't mean that privilege is contested; rather, you get to enjoy its prerogatives even if you're not one of the privileged. A woman gets to treat a man, or another woman, with the same brutal authority a man has exercised over her. [...] The practice of S/M depends on a mutual respect generally absent from the relations between the powerful and the weak. [...] S/M is nontheless profoundly conservative in that its imagination of pleasure is almost entirely defined by the dominant culture to which it thinks of itself as giving "a stinging slap in the face". It is true that those who exercise power

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26.   On the question of the social construction of sexuality Rubin recognises, with Foucault, that 'sexuality' and 'erotic speciations' are the result of discursive construction. However, pluralist feminists are less concerned to outline the ways in which female sexuality is socially constructed than to demonstrate that radical feminists are wrong about the workings of power. They differ, therefore, from other feminists who have focused on the social construction of femininity through disciplinary devices (see in particular Bordo, 1989; and Bartky, 1990).

generally don't admit to the excitement they derive from such exercises. To recognize this excitement may challenge the hypocrisy of authority, but it certainly doesn't challenge authority itself. On the contrary; it reveals the unshakeable foundation on which power is built. Its exercise, S/M'ers never stop telling us, is thrilling, and it can be just as thrilling for the victim as for the victimizer (Bersani, 1995:86, 87-88).

In general then the pluralist feminist endorsement of power as everywhere, dilutes the possibility of a critique of patriarchal and other forms of sexual power.

Pluralist Politics and Ethics: Promising but Problematic

Pluralist feminists are wary of what they see as the prescriptivism inherent in radical feminist sexual ethics and politics. It is argued that this should be replaced with the encouragement of the *expression* of sexual desires, pleasures, acts and identities that exist in a plural sexual sphere. It is not that power and oppression do not occur in the field of sexuality - indeed it is riddled with 'sex law', persecution and so on. Rather Rubin argues that this very sexual oppression, with its assumption of 'sexual guilt' and burdening with an excess of significance (Rubin, 1984:278, 279), demonstrates that what is needed is a sexual *pluralism* in which the recognition of diversity in sexual practice, identity and desire is paramount. What is oppressive for theorists like Rubin, is the imposition of a single sexual standard on the multiplicity of sexualities.

Pluralist feminism shares with radical feminism a form of identity politics. Both radical and pluralist feminists are concerned that proper *recognition* is given to women's authentic sexuality and that women have the opportunity to *express* that sexuality in their lives. Hence pluralist feminists also share a version of expressivism with radical feminists. However, where radical feminists have a monistic version of authentic female sexuality, pluralist feminists pose the notion of sexual plurality. For pluralist feminists 'women's sexuality' does not exist in the unitary way that is associated with radical feminism. Rather there is a great diversity in the forms by which sexualities are expressed. Women may have desires for s/m, or butch-femme role-playing or other sexual 'perversions' and this diversity should be celebrated. Each 'erotic speciation' should have its day in the sun.

While sexuality is seen as a sphere of 'benign sexual variation', it is also recognised that there

exists a field of politics in which various 'erotic speciations' ('boy-lovers' alongside the 'homosexual', the 'gay man', the 'lesbian sado-masochist', 'the heterosexual' and so on) are engaged in a struggle for social space (Rubin, 1984:306). These struggles take the form of 'territorial and border wars ... [with] struggles over the nature and boundaries of sexual zones' (Rubin, 1984:294-5). However, these border wars are viewed as counter-productive and pluralist feminists argue that a more appropriate response is to encourage an *expansion* in the field of sexual possibilities. Women's interests are best met by an alliance with other oppressed sexual minorities rather than in the search for separation from men and a unitary 'homosexual desire'.

Pluralist feminists see in the empirical existence of sexual diversity reason enough to support a pluralistic sexual politics. For example Gayle Rubin sees the expression of sexual diversity as being *good* in itself. She argues that we do not worry unduly about differences in cuisine, but that sexual diversity attracts all kinds of moral outrage and legislation. The implication of Rubin's argument here is that perhaps our choice of sexual practice and partner should be subject to the same *minimal interference* that our food choices face. However this argument seems to miss the point that sex bears the weight of cultural, emotional and relational meanings that are only very rarely placed on food.

For her part, Rubin wants to *minimise* the significance of these meanings and of the substantive ethic they assume. She argues that an appropriate sexual ethic would emphasise a 'democratic morality' concerned with mutuality, the absence or presence of coercion and the quality of pleasures (Rubin, 1984:283). Because the mutuality to which Rubin refers remains unspecified, she relegates sex to a sphere of bodily pleasure only and loses sight of some of the complexity and richness that may be a desirable feature of sexual relations. Freedom is defined as a monological right to self-determination. This position seems to be blind to the role and significance of community and affectional ties in everyone's sexual life.

While pluralist feminists emphasise the plural meanings of sex (i.e. sex may emphasise love, commitment or pleasure) the ultimate rationale for sex tends towards the 'primacy of pleasure' (Ferguson, 1989:150). In this respect ethical questions are reduced to ones in

relation to consent. Freedom for pluralist feminists lies in a form of self-determination in which the expression of authentic desires and attainment of pleasure are the main criteria for what is 'good' sex. Consent and absence from coercion are the key elements in such a minimalist ethic. If women decide to be involved in sexual activities of whatever kind, and in the absence of coercion freely choose these practices, then these decisions have to be honoured as a right of the individual.

It is clear then that pluralist feminism tends towards an individualism in which people are abstracted from their social context and relational setting. While the shift from the radical feminist equation of gender and sexuality is useful, pluralist feminists often do not pay enough attention to the powerful structuring effect of the gender hierarchy on women. In addition a pluralist perspective that is based on a minimalist and formal procedural ethic of consent falls into a relativism that is incapable of making the kinds of judgements that seem necessary about sexual relationships and practices.

To conclude then, there are several problems afflicting a pluralist feminist sexual politics and ethics that are related to the problems associated with pluralism more generally. Firstly, the existence of sexual diversity has been construed in such a way that sexual difference is absolutised. As such it shares with a more general pluralism a 'depthlessness' and 'flatness' in which sexual difference becomes 'a new all-purpose privileged abstraction' (McLennan, 1995:83). As a new form of monistic perspective, sexual pluralism ironically obliterates those differences (in style, content, substance, power and so on) that exist *between* various forms of sexual difference. This is illustrated with Rubin's positioning of 'boy-lovers' alongside other 'erotic speciations' as equally oppressed minorities who deserve protection from sex law. There are two related issues here. Rubin and other pluralist feminists tend to treat sexual diversity as if each of its variants were of a similar nature. So differences between people in terms of practice, sexual object choice (gendered or in fetishised objects), identity, mode (passive or active) and so on are treated as if they are all of a similar 'kind'. Clearly this is an unsatisfactory way of approaching sexual diversity. As just one example the question of 'boy-loving', framed like this, encourages an approach that focuses on a legitimate, and responsible desire rather than on questions of power. It is a political and

ethical issue of a very different nature, for example, to that of homosexual identity and practice. An approach that fails to distinguish between different kinds of sexuality leads to a peculiar 'politics of indifference' in which 'each expression of autonomy is in effect as valid as any other' (McLennan, 1995:84). Each element within the diversity of 'erotic speciations' is assumed to be of the same significance politically, personally and ethically and leads to a refusal to 'draw the line' between more or less acceptable forms of sexual difference.

As McLennan suggests 'there is probably no option today but to be a pluralist of sorts' (McLennan, 1995:8). However, the form of sexual pluralism that was developed by some feminists throughout the eighties does not do justice to the ethical and political decisions that face women. Nevertheless, it is not difficult to see why pluralism seemed an attractive option for those feminists who were attempting to think through questions of sexual freedom in a way that did not collapse into the radical feminist conceptualisation of a totalistic, imprisoning power relations and assertion of a singular form of sexual practice. The failure of pluralist feminism as a project of the kind which began with books like *Pleasure and Danger* does not rule out some kind of pluralist and feminist project. However, this project as it has been developed to date is sufficiently attentive to questions of value and judgement. This should stand as a warning against simply valorising sexual difference in the absence of other ethical guidelines.

Beyond Permissive Pleasures and Patriarchal Plots: Women's Sexual Authenticity and Autonomy in an Age of Risk

A central question for feminists in their deliberations about sexual freedom has been whether sex should be considered the 'thick cream of life' or that which 'curdles' human relations (Snitow et al, 1984:26). In this evocative statement the editors of *Desire* express a central dilemma for feminists. Is women's sexual autonomy to be gained through saying 'yes' or 'no' to sex? (Snitow et al, 1984:20). It should be clear by now that this is the wrong question. Sex is a realm of social life that is neither completely ruled by patriarchal fiat, nor is it a sphere of limitless pleasures there for the taking. Moreover it is undesirable to conceptualise sex in a dualistic fashion as primarily concerning either the pursuit of pleasure or the realisation of relations of intimacy. It is possible that the search for intimacy might

lead to stultifying relations that deny others the expression of their authentic desires. And the pursuit of pleasure, unmediated by relations of mutuality, may result in denying others the respect and dignity that they deserve by virtue of their humanity.

The issues that feminists have raised in relation to women's sexual autonomy have taken on a new urgency in an age of HIV risk. In Chapter One I outlined how permissive and women-centred discourses of sexuality have been viewed as possible models for women's sexual empowerment. Arguments in favour of each discourse have drawn on pre-existing theoretical and political debates as ways of thinking through how women might be empowered to enjoy sexual relationships that are both safe and satisfying. My argument has been that neither of these discourses separately, nor when they are joined together (as in the Kippax et al argument), provides a satisfactory resource for feminists thinking through questions of safe sex in relation to sexual freedom. A more appropriate model is found in thinking about questions of women's sexual authenticity in relation to narrative identity and situating this authenticity in the context of a broader set of ethical concerns.

The question of the authenticity of women's sexual desires is indeed complex. Radical feminists have drawn attention to the ways in which women's sexuality has been constructed around the desires and imperatives of male sexuality. For example a coital imperative structures heterosexual relations in a way that often privileges male pleasure over female pleasure. Underneath what women often experience as desires for penetration, for example, are other more authentic desires for whole-body eroticism. Pluralist feminists on the other hand have suggested that the problem for women is that they have been denied the right to *express* the range of sexual pleasures that they desire. Questions of etiology are rejected in favour of valorising all sexual differences and desires.

In this thesis I have not attempted to explain the complex ways in which sexual desires may be established in the consciousness of individuals. It seems to me that this is an important question in which issues of the patriarchal construction of sexuality are relevant. However I am more concerned with exploring sexual authenticity insofar as it connects with the level of sexual agency. In this regard I have argued that the concept of narrative identity sheds

some light on the ways in which women experience and shape their sexual lives. This concept is a corrective to radical and pluralist feminist conceptualisations of identity in categorical terms. It suggests, as Patricia Williams has argued in relation to her own multi-layed identity, that *'governing narratives* or *presiding fictions'* are means by which we shape our lives, sometimes taking control over our destinies in the process (Williams, 1991; quoted in Somers and Gibson, 1994:37 - original emphasis).

These identities also form the basis of sexual politics and are:

> rooted in part in ideals and moral aspirations that we cannot realize fully. There is therefore, a tension within us which can be both the locus of personal struggle and the source of an identity politics that aims not simply at the legitimation of falsely essential categorical identities but at living up to deeper social and moral values (Calhoun, 1994:29).

The social and moral values to which Calhoun refers are an essential aspect of sexual politics and ethics. Such values are necessary for feminists if their discourse is not to fall into the serious difficulties attendant on a complacent style of relativism.

CHAPTER FOUR

SAINT FOUCAULT QUEERS THE PITCH

...if Michel Foucault had never existed, queer politics would have had to invent him. More powerfully than any other thinker I know, Foucault *politicizes* both truth and the body, an accomplishment of crucial importance for gay and lesbian political resistance in the age of AIDS. In particular Foucault's political critique of sexual discourse gives queers of all sorts a powerful weapon with which to challenge and to resist the discursive operations of contemporary homophobia, if not always to prevail against the institutions in which its criminalizing, pathologizing, and moralizing discourses are entrenched. Beyond that, and even more important, Foucault gives us, in place of a theory of sexuality that would tell us the truth about sex, a critique of theoretical discourses about sexuality (Halperin, 1995:120-1).

Introduction

This chapter takes as its substantive focus, contemporary debates about the 'sexual liberation' of 'homosexuals'. Although the earliest expressions of a human sexual liberation were *tolerant* of homosexuality, Reich was of the opinion that ultimately homosexuality would wither away in a truly sexually liberated society. These claims for tolerance were also important in early homophile forms of homosexual politics. However by the late 1960s, homosexual politics had become transformed into *emancipatory* movements for the 'liberation' of gay people. Whereas there has always been some question whether sexual liberation is a political goal that can be compatible with women's liberation, for gay liberation the very *raison d'etre* of such politics is the establishment of freedom from oppression for gay people on the basis of their sexual object choice. Accordingly, the sexual is central to an understanding of homosexual identities and the freedoms that are sought. Therefore homosexual politics, in all its forms, involves a critique of the universalism of theories of sexual liberation that focus on a *common sexuality* at the expense of recognising the *specificity* of homosexual desires, practices and identities. This concern for questions of *identity* continues to be the dominant theme around which debates about the sexual freedoms of homosexual men and women now circulate.

My approach to these debates is articulated through an engagement with 'queer theory'. Rather than attempt a literature review of previous forms of homosexual politics,[1] I wish to focus directly on queer theory because it addresses concerns that are at the heart of this thesis.   In particular, I am interested in the way that queer theory positions itself as an opponent of humanism and modernist theory. Queer theory divides scholarship and politics on the question of gay liberation, between those who place 'gay identity' at the heart of gay theory and politics, and its own position which is concerned to move beyond viewing homosexuals as a minority group whose identities are the foundation for theory and politics. For the queer theorist, the claims of the liberatory politics of gay liberation, as well as other movements for sexual liberation (much of feminism included), fail to secure sexual freedom for its 'constituents' because 'liberation' is, by its very nature, a mechanism of modern bio-power.

> In our present context, then, liberation movements bind us more closely to the very thing from which we may need most urgently to emancipate ourselves. What we ultimately have to liberate ourselves from may be nothing less than "freedom" itself - that is, from the liberal concept of freedom as a regulative or normative ideal of responsible and self-respecting human conduct (Halperin, 1995:20-21).

Halperin suggests that liberationist politics have utilised a repressive model of power and in so doing have missed Foucault's fundamentally radical point that power operates by requiring us to *exhibit,* not repress, certain sexual desires, identities and moralities. We are not free to *not* express our sexuality and so are tied into modern disciplining discourses of sexuality (Halperin, 1995:20).

The theoretical support for much of the queer critique is derived from Foucault's theorisations of sexuality. Halperin's formulations of this queer critique are particularly exemplary of this strand of queer theorising, and this chapter will therefore closely follow the arguments that he develops in *Saint Foucault.* In concentrating on one text it could be

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1.   There are now several very good analytical overviews of different forms of homosexual politics. See in particular Steven Seidman's (1993, 1995) chronology of the development of gay politics in Western societies over this period. He discusses gay liberation (dominant between the late 1960s and mid 1970s), gay 'ethnic' politics (dominant from the mid 1970s to the mid 1980s) and finally the queer challenge of the nineties. These three approaches to the question of gay sexual freedom still co-exist in an uneasy tension in contemporary gay politics. They do not represent a 'progression' so much as a set of competing theoretical, political and ethical responses to thinking through, and living, the question of sexual freedom for homosexual people.

argued that I am doing violence to the 'irreducible plurality' that exists within queer theory. Certainly, there is a danger that by focusing on a single work by one author I will fail to capture all the nuances that exist under the rubric of queer. However, I believe that this is a useful strategy, because the text in question raises questions that are at the heart of the concerns of this thesis. Firstly, it addresses the work of Foucault, a theorist already at the centre of contemporary debates about sexual freedom. Halperin argues that a properly 'resistant' gay politics is only possible if it takes Foucault's ideas to heart. Secondly, it is a text motivated by the AIDS crisis. Thirdly, it is centrally concerned with the politics of gay and sexual liberation. Halperin's text is therefore of particular interest, because it is representative of a form of queer critique that directly addresses the question of sexual freedom.[2]

My approach is similar to that taken by Lovibond (1996) in her critical engagement with Judith Butler's work as representative of anti-humanist feminism. Lovibond defends her approach by arguing, contra Butler, that it does not lead to a '"violent reduction" of a textual field', rather it is a useful strategy for thinking 'synthetically about what one reads' and therefore passing 'from a state of ignorance about, or disorientation within, a texutal field to one of relative comprehension' (Lovibond, 1996:99). Lovibond sees this method of critique as, at least potentially, a 'remedy for a certain condition of powerlessness' (ibid), especially if it is conducted scrupulously (ibid:100). My approach to the debates within queer theory is, therefore, to take Halperin's text as standing for a certain influential strand within this textual field. In brief, I continue with the claim raised in Chapter Two that Foucault is an unsuitable moral source for radical sexual politics. Indeed, I want to argue that to continue following a Foucauldian path in theorising sexual freedom, is to court 'epistemic loss'. As in the previous chapters, I will be arguing that a better approach to the question of sexual freedom for those who live safe-sex desire, is found through recognising the significance of authenticity, narrativity and recognition.

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2.   Other queer theorists have slightly different issues that drive their analysis. For example Judith Butler's
        (1990, 1993) work on the heterosexual matrix or heterosexual hegemony is developed with a focus on
        gender analysis. Eve Sedgwick's (1990) book *The Epistemology of the Closet*, while focusing on the
        homosexual/heterosexual binary that is central to queer analyses, does this as part of a broader critique
        of cultural knowledge.

What is the Queer Critique, and Why Now?

> Queer marks both a continuity and a break with previous gay liberationist and lesbian feminist models. Lesbian feminist models of organisation were correctives to the masculinist bias of a gay liberation which itself had grown out of dissatisfactions with earlier homophile organisations. Similarly, queer effects a rupture which, far from being absolute, is meaningful only in the context of its historical development. [...] Queer is a product of specific cultural and theoretical pressures which increasingly structured debates (both within and outside the academy) about questions of lesbian and gay identity. Perhaps most significant in this regard has been the problematising by post-structuralism of gay liberationist and lesbian feminist understandings of identity and the operations of power (Jagose, 1996:75, 76).

Steven Seidman (1993, 1995) situates the queer critique as the third phase in post-Stonewall gay politics. It is both inheritor and critic of the gay liberationist project. The queer critique shares that aspect of gay liberationist theory which 'frames freedom as the proliferation of bodies, desires, pleasures and forms of intimate life' (Seidman, 1993:116). However, the queer perspective is critical of the liberationist theorisation of a repressive power. Queer theorists and activists also position themselves against a form of gay politics that had more or less replaced gay liberation by the end of the mid-1970s. What has come to be called an 'ethnic model' of sexual identity and politics developed as gay politics moved on to the business of building communities and forms of social support for gay-identified men and women. This model rejected the gay liberationist notion that society should be liberated 'by liberating "the homosexual in everyone". Instead homosexuals should concentrate their energies on social advancement *as homosexuals*' (Epstein, 1990:256 - original emphasis).

Gay ethnicity in this context, then, refers to a series of identity claims (gay as a fundamental and often an 'essential' aspect of self) made by individuals who were located in a self-identified community of similar others. The political legitimacy for the claims of gay people came from their possession of an 'ethnic-like' identity in which there is some (often vaguely defined) gay 'core' that differs in socially significant ways from heterosexuals (Epstein, 1990:257). Epstein argues that gay men and women abandoned the liberationist version of identity as too utopian and 'open'. Most gay men and lesbians did not recognise themselves in the notions of polymorphous sexuality or bisexuality and instead wished to claim an identity that was in some respects 'essential' - that is it *felt* personal, relatively stable and a fundamental aspect of the self. As a legitimate ethnic-like minority group alongside others,

it was argued that gay men and women deserved social and political recognition through tolerance, granting of basic civil rights and the elimination of discrimination. This represents a change in political discourse from a gay liberationist vision of creating a new humanity, shared by all, to an *ethnic* model of 'identity and single-interest group politics' (Seidman, 1995:121). This gay ethnic politics manifested itself differently for men and women. For gay men it fostered an assimilationist politics, while lesbian feminism developed a form of gender separatism (Seidman, 1993:117).

It is this ethnic model of gay politics that has become the subject of queer critique. In particular the increasing tensions that were experienced in gay communities around the diversity that existed within the category of 'gay' (especially in relation to 'racial' ethnicity, but also class, bisexuality and sexual practices such as s/m) encouraged the development of new queer forms of politics and theorising. This increasing emphasis on the pluralisation of difference, coupled with a critique of previous theoretical and political understandings of identity, is characteristic of all those who come within a broadly-defined queer paradigm.[3] At the centre of queer theory is a rejection of modernist notions of identity, associated with dominant forms of gay politics, and its replacement with the notion of 'difference'.

This focus on the question of 'identity' involves three interconnected isues. Firstly, there are claims made about the nature of same-sex desire, about its social construction, cultural location and historical existence. Debates at this level tend to focus on the relationship between same-sex desire and the power relations that surround such desires. Queer theory enters these debates by arguing that both essentialist and constructionist notions of gay identity are problematic. Instead of trying to identify a core gay sexuality (natural or constructed) that has been oppressed, queer theory posits the existence of a heterosexual/homosexual binary that is constitutive of sexuality, power relations and indeed the whole of the social fabric. This binary functions as the key means to produce homophobic

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3.   As exemplary authors see Halperin (1995), Sedgewick (1991), Butler (1990, 1993), Edelman (1991), Duggan (1992, 1994); and the edited texts *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories* (Fuss, 1991) and *Fear of a Queer Planet* (Warner, 1993). A useful short introduction to queer theory is found in Jagose's (1996) *Queer Theory*. Seidman's (1996) edited text *Queer Theory/Sociology* provides a valuable forum for debates about the contributions, and critiques, to be made between queer theory and sociology.

discourses in cultural texts and by doing so creates hierarchies of inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion.

Secondly, the question of how to effect change in these power relations raises the issue of politics and the best form of collective organisation or resistance to dismantle such power relations. Gay liberationist and gay ethnic politics work on the assumption that identity is a good basis for the organisation of politics. On the other hand, queer theorists argue that gay and lesbian politics work on the basis of an *affirmative* homosexual identity, that traps them within an 'identity logic' and which creates its own exclusions (of, for example, bisexuals, and people's whose sexual practice is not organised primarily around the *gender* of their sexual partner(s)). Queer politics is, therefore, concerned to identify the 'limits of identity' (Jagose, 1996:58-71) and to suggest that freedom from heteronormative forms of power is best secured through the denaturalisation of gay identity.

Finally, the queer critique of identity and identity politics also involves an ethical dimension concerned with the nature of the ethical self that chooses queer forms of life. This raises the question of what kinds of relations should exist between people in order to live 'good' sexual lives. Liberationist and ethnic gay politics work with an ethics of authenticity while queer politics favour a transgressive approach, emphasising the radical and challenging nature of queer forms of life to heteronormative power relations. At the level of relations between individuals, queer theorists have been influenced above all, by Foucault's aesthetics of existence.

Each of these three aspects of the queer critique of identity are found in Halperin's text *Saint Foucualt*. Halperin is a devotee of 'Saint Foucault' because he believes that Foucault's analysis of the 'political economy of "sexual discourse" enables us to devise some effective strategies for confronting and resisting the discursive operations of contemporary homophobia'(Halperin, 1995:30). Here Halperin identifies both the kind of power that is to be opposed, primarily a particular form of sexual *discourse* that is homophobic, as well as the shape that opposition to this power must take through a politics of *resistance*. Halperin agrees with Foucault's remonstration that his 'work has had nothing to do with gay

liberation' (Halperin, 1995:31) as it has developed in Western societies. However, while Halperin rejects an *emancipatory* approach to the question of 'homosexual freedom', he endorses a Foucauldianism that he argues is utterly necessary for the delegitimation of heterosexist authority and for empowering gay practices of knowledge and community (Halperin, 1995:31). On the question of politics, David Halperin, like many writers who broadly speaking occupy the terrain of the 'queer theorist', is somewhat sceptical about the efficacy of a politics that is organised around the name of 'queer'. He argues that it may have outlived its usefulness (Halperin, 1995:112) and is perhaps better thought of as a 'placeholder' for important identities still in the process of being constructed - as a 'state of becoming rather than as the referent for an actually existing form of life' (Halperin, 1995:113). However, as a 'placeholder', the notion of a queer 'non-identity' is developed by Halperin through his ideas about marginal positionality. Halperin also expands on Foucault's ideas about ethics to suggest that a queer 'ascesis', that is practices or techniques that involve *cultivating* a self-transcending self, is the most appropriate way of life if resistance to the heteronormative aspect of the self is to be achieved.

My general argument in the rest of this chapter is that a concern for the diversity that exists within categories of the sexual does not require an acceptance of the assertions of postmodernism and queer theory. While postmodernism and queer theory high light important problems associated with sexual identity politics and liberationist theory, the suggested solutions at a theoretical, political and ethical level are less than satisfactory. In my engagement with *Saint Foucault* I will draw on the resources of other models of gay liberation and social and ethical theory, in order to provide a three-fold critique of queer politics. Firstly, I argue that queer theory 'resolves' the social constructionist debate by problematically focusing on the cultural level of knowledge and epistemology. Secondly, a politics of denaturalisation and resistance is no real improvement on the identity politics of recognition that it seeks to replace. Thirdly, the queer ethical model of an aesthetics of existence produces a problematic postmodern proceduralism. As such it remains trapped within a monological model of autonomy and the self.

The Aporias of a Queer Critique of Heteronormativity

> power ... produces possibilities of action, of choice - and, ultimately, it produces the conditions for the exercise of freedom (just as freedom constitutes a condition for the exercise of power). ... What escapes from relations of power - and something always does escape, according to Foucault - does not escape from the reach of power to a place outside power, but represents the limit of power, its reversal or rebound (Halperin: 1995:17-18).

Following in Foucault's footsteps Halperin is at pains to argue that there is no outside to power. In the quote above, Halperin makes a convoluted and, I would suggest, ultimately meaningless argument. Centrally, it is difficult to see how something can both 'escape' relations of power and, at the same time, still remain within 'the reach' of power. Such a conceptualisation of power remains somewhat indeterminate, and freedom and power, meanwhile, start to sound like very much the same thing. The lack of specificity of 'power' and connection to concrete social relations rob it of any theoretical efficacy.[4] While these opening comments by Halperin on Foucault's ideas about power are vague in the extreme, he does go on to develop a more specific analysis of the role of a particular form of 'heteronormative' power in the lives of homosexuals. The critique is developed through three connected steps. Firstly Halperin identifies the power that is exercised through sexual discourses of homophobia. He notes the logical contradictions within these discourses and in so doing makes an argument, following Eve Sedgwick, that an *epistemology of the closet* operates. Under such conditions it is impossible, and indeed strategically irrelevant, to attempt to refute such discourses with recourse to some notion of 'truth'. Secondly, he outlines the *form* a discourse analysis of sexual discourses should take. Here he argues that rather than trying to establish the *truth content* of sexual discourses, it is more important to identify the overall *strategies of power* that they entail. From that angle sexuality is to be understood as a 'traversal point for relations of power', rather than having its source in the

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4.   Halperin follows this discussion of power with a section where he addresses what he sees as the limitations of Foucault's 'non-gay-identified academic left-wing' male critics (Halperin, 1995:21). In this way he seeks to argue that these theoretical critiques of Foucault's understanding of power are an effect of the homophobia or heterosexism of the critics. This seems unconvincing on two grounds. Firstly Halperin does not actually provide an articulated argument about how the critiques of Peter Dews, Edward Said and Charles Taylor are an effect of their heterosexuality, or of a more general theoretical heteronormativity pervading their work. Secondly, such an approach ignores the feminist and lesbian critiques of Foucault. Halperin 'resolves' the question of a Foucauldian definition of power by recourse to some authorities of his own, presumably not 'non-gay-identified' who have 'scrupulously examined and persuasively refuted' the objections to Foucault's theory (Halperin, 1995:22). But we largely have to take his word for the thoroughness of this rebuttal.

body. Finally, Halperin returns to the work of queer theorists such as Judith Butler (1990, 1993), Lee Edelman (1991) and Eve Sedgwick (1990) to explore the source of the incoherence, but ultimate power, of homophobic discourse in the construction of a *heterosexual/homosexual binary*.

Homophobic Discourses, the Epistemology of the Closet and the Hetero/Homo Binary

Queer theorists are critical of the claims of gay liberationists that gay people are oppressed through the threefold operation of persecution, discrimination and liberal tolerance (Altman, 1972:33). Halperin rejects such a view, arguing instead that it is not so much gay-bashers, police, the law or hostile institutions that are the problem for gay people, but rather the 'pervasive and multiform *strategies of homophobia* that shape public and private *discourses,* saturate the entire field of *cultural representation*, and like power in Foucault's formulation, are everywhere' (Halperin, 1995:32 - my emphasis). The enemy from this view is less a set of material institutions and social practices, than an *epistemological strategy*. A global form of cultural knowledge, in the form of homophobic discourses, functions as a strategy for the delegitimation of homosexuality.

These discourses of homophobia do not have a 'fixed propositional content' (Halperin, 1995:33). To illustrate this, Halperin gives as examples the various ways in which homosexuality has been understood (as for example sin or a state of nature), and how these different understandings have functioned as excuses for the incarceration of homosexuals (whether in prisons because of the criminal status of homosexuality or in asylums because of homosexual 'insanity'). Halperin argues that rather than these contradictions being a source of weakness for homophobic discourses, they 'give rise to a series of *double binds* which function - incoherently, to be sure, but nonetheless effectively and systematically - to impair the lives of lesbians and gay men' (Halperin, 1995:34 - my emphasis). These contradictory homophobic discourses operate within an 'epistemology of the closet' that structures knowledges, selves and social life around the binary division of heterosexual/homosexual (Sedgwick, 1990). Sedgwick's 'epistemology of the closet' has been taken up in a number of queer texts as an argument that the source of homophobia is to be found in a multitude of

cultural *knowledges* (popular and elite) that operate through constructing a heterosexual/homosexual binarism.[5] For Sedgwick, this binary has profound significance right across the social fabric and is a key element of a power/knowledge regime that orders not only sexual desires, but also social institutions and social relations everywhere. In her much quoted opening paragraph,[6] Sedgwick states that her book:

> proposes that many of the major nodes of thought and knowledge in twentieth-century Western culture as a whole are structured - indeed fractured - by a chronic, now endemic crisis of homo/heterosexual definition [...] The book will argue that an understanding of virtually any aspect of modern Western culture must be, not merely incomplete, but damaged in its central substance to the degree that it does not incorporate a critical analysis of modern homo/heterosexual definition (Sedgwick, 1990:1).

This notion of the epistemology of the closet has been used to critique the gay liberationist claim that when gay men and lesbians 'come out' they free themselves from the shackles of a heterosexist system that requires silence from its homosexual members. For gay liberationists, the closet, which may be perceived as a refuge and survival strategy, should be left behind. By 'coming out', gay men and women are able to foster the self-affirmation of a proud gay identity and petition straight society to recognise the worthiness of such an identity. However, in line with his belief that power is inescapable, Halperin argues that coming out involves exposing oneself to other dangers:

> to make oneself into a convenient screen onto which straight people can project all the fantasies they routinely entertain about gay people, and to suffer one's every gesture, statement, expression, and opinion to be totally and irrevocably marked by the overwhelming social significance of one's acknowledged homosexual identity (Halperin, 1995:30).

The epistemology of the closet works by capturing homosexuals in the double bind of never being wholly in, nor wholly out of the closet. To be 'in' the closet entails a fear that one has not actually kept the secret well enough. Halperin argues that the gay person does not know if people are treating them as straight because the secret has been kept, or because 'they are playing along with you and enjoying the epistemological privilege that your ignorance of their

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5.   Sedgwick focuses on elite discourses, while the authors of the edited volume *Inside/Out* look at popular culture. See also Doty (1993).

6.   See for example Seidman (1993, 1995); Halperin (1995); Bersani (1995); and Epstein (1996).

knowledge affords them' (Halperin, 1995:34). The other side to the contradictory nature of the closet is that straight people use their knowledge of your gayness (and your ignorance of this knowledge) as an epistemological privilege through which they 'insist on constructing your sexuality as a secret to which they have special access, a secret which always gives itself away to their superior and knowing gaze' (Halperin, 1995:35). This reading of the meaning of the closet constructs an impossibly contradictory place that homosexuals are never fully able to escape.

For queer theorists, the chief process that maintains and reproduces the closet as a site of oppression are *homophobic discourses* that draw on contradictory 'slanders and fantasies' (Halperin, 1995:37). Halperin argues that it is pointless for gay men and lesbians to attempt to refute the 'lies of homophobia' because:

> refuting them does nothing to impair the strategic functioning of discourses that operate precisely by deploying a series of mutually contradictory premises in such a way that any one of them can be substituted for any other, as different circumstances may require, without changing the final outcome of the argument (Halperin, 1995:38).

If the task is not to attempt to refute homophobic lies, Halperin does not believe that gay people should give up the struggle for 'freedom'. The task is to engage in forms of discourse analysis that focus on the overall *strategies* of discourses rather than on their *content*. In this way, Halperin follows the queer tendency to focus on the cultural level. Halperin makes the by now well recognised Foucauldian claim that 'sexuality' is not a 'thing' that can be understood through science, but is the *effect* of discursive practices. There is no stable object to study and know. It is not 'a natural drive but instead ... "an especially concentrated point of traversal for relations of power"' (Halperin, 1995:40). Therefore, sexuality becomes meaningful only as an object of knowledge that supports the modern regime of bio-power, it is in no way 'a ... real thing, an objective natural phenomenon to be known by the mind' (Halperin, 1995:41). Sexuality is instead a 'positivity produced by those knowledge practices and situated by their epistemic operations in the place of the real' (Halperin, 1995:42).

Halperin argues that Foucault's version of sexuality is politically useful for gay men and lesbians because through the *politicisation of truth and the body*, Foucault opens up sites for the contestation of homophobic discourses. This contestation is not in the form of *refuting*

bizarre claims about the supposed 'truth' about gay men and lesbians, but in describing *how* the discourses function in the construction of certain kinds of subjects and objects. These discourses are described as being 'murderously pathologizing, criminalizing, and moralizing discourses, one of whose comparatively minor effects has been to deauthorize our subjective experiences and to delegitimate our claims to be able to speak knowledgeably about our own lives' (Halperin, 1995:42). It is this delegitimation of 'homosexual speech' that is one of the key effects of the hetersexual/homosexual binary. Halperin synthesises the work of several key queer theorists writing on this binary[7] and identifies both deconstructive and psychoanalytic modes of analysis. While these two modes of analysis are distinguishable, and in some respects have different emphases, Halperin argues that they can easily be combined - indeed Judith Bulter's work is an example of just such a combination. However, Halperin tends to remain at the level of the discursive and deconstructive, and it is this that will be the focus of my discussion.

In the heterosexual/homosexual binary, the two terms exist in an hierarchal relation to each other. Heterosexuality is unmarked - the state of 'normality' - while homosexuality is marked by its difference from normality. Heterosexuality is the absence of abnormality and the negation of homosexuality. However, it is homosexuality that is the prior term, structurally and logically. The unmarked term (heterosexuality) needs homosexuality for its naturalness and normality to be established and stabilised (Halperin, 1995:43-45). In this context, homosexuality, like sexuality, 'is not a name that refers to a "natural kind" of thing; it's a discursive, and homophobic, construction that has come to be misrecognised as an object under the epistemological regime known as *realism*' (Halperin, 1995:45 - original emphasis). Halperin is at pains to argue that this does not mean that homosexuality is unreal, just that it is 'a constructed reality' and that it functions as a 'projection, a conceptual and semiotic dumping ground for all sorts of mutually contradictory notions' (Halperin, 1995:45). Homosexuality becomes an *object* of knowledge in which those who come under that category are to be judged and found wanting because of their social deviance, unnaturalness, moral laxity and sexual perversion. That these attributes are clearly contradictory is not a

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7.   In particular Judith Butler, Lee Edelman, Eve Sedgwick, Michael Warner, Simon Watney, Paul Morrison and D.A. Miller.

source of *weakness* for heteronormativity, but of *power*. While it is not logically possible to be both '*sick* and *blameworthy* in respect of the same defect' (Halperin, 1995:46), these contradictions serve to undermine the legitimacy of homosexuality as a sexual practice.

Halperin argues that exactly the opposite effect arises out of the contradictions associated with heterosexuality's status as: (i) a social norm; (ii) a natural condition; (iii) an accomplishment; and (iv) an unstable and precarious state that can be overthrown by exposure to homosexuality too often, or at an impressionable phase of life. These contradictions do not delegitimate heterosexuality, indeed they thrive, reinforce one another and are politically effective because of 'their privileged invisibility and the ignorance that surrounds them' (Halperin, 1995:47). It is heterosexuality's status as the condition and *subject* of knowledge, and conversely homosexuality's status as the *object* of knowledge that reproduces the abjection of homosexuality and the invisible power of heterosexuality as normative. Heterosexuality from this view is never the object of the critical gaze, because it is the 'disinterested, nonpartisan, legitimate position from which to speak' (Halperin, 1995:47), and as such, those contradictions that do exist in relation to the definition of heterosexuality remain invisible and do not disable, but rather authorise its position of normality.

> Indeed, if heterosexual credentials ever *do* have to be presented, they not only fail to work but tend to invalidate themselves in the process: as all the world knows, there's no quicker or surer way to compromise your own heterosexuality than by proclaiming it. After all, if you really were straight, why would you have to say so? (Halperin, 1995:48).

A Critique of Halperin's Account of Homophobic Power

In the argument, outlined above, Halperin claims that the source and nature of the forces that constrain the lives of homosexual people is one based on an epistemological strategy. This strategy maintains its power through a particular construction of knowledge and by identifying the *subject* of that power (heterosexuals) and the *object* of that power (homosexuals). For Halperin, the *content* of homophobic discourses are irrelevant, given that there is an overall *strategy* at work through an epistemological process that has its effects throughout the realm of the social. This approach has identified an interesting and indeed important aspect of homosexual oppression. I have no difficulty acknowledging that the

contradictory discourses about heterosexuality and homosexuality do appear to work differentially - empowering heterosexuality in some respects (through heterosexuality's invisible and unproblematic status) and disempowering homosexuals. However a recognition of this dynamic does not necessarily lead to an endorsement of other problematic aspects of the queer critique. In the rest of this section I will identify what I consider to be important silences and contradictory claims made by Halperin, particularly in relation to the meaning and significance of discourse, power and 'truth'. There are five related issues that I wish to deal with here. Firstly, Halperin's account uses an overly global form of analysis. Secondly, I question the notion that the primary form of power in homosexual oppression is epistemological. Thirdly, the nominalism of Halperin's Foucauldian approach will be addressed. Fourthly, Halperin's critical approach based on discourse analysis and a particular understanding of 'truth' is the subject of critique. Finally the neglect of gender will be briefly addressed.

One of the most striking aspects of the critique put forward by Halperin and other queer theorists, is the claim made about the *global* nature of the heterosexual/homosexual binary. It is argued that this binary is not just one, but *the* most culturally relevant structuring principle, not just in relation to questions of sexuality but also, of the entire breadth and depth of social relations - of the very constitution of self and society. As Seidman suggests 'queer analysts claim for the hetero/homo binary the status of a *master category* of social analysis' (Seidman, 1995:132 - my emphasis). Indeed, it is not too fanciful to suggest that the trajectory of Sedgwick's analysis (on which so much of queer theory rests) is to take under the sign of the hetero/homo binary, *all* forms of cultural organisation including the pairings of 'masculine/feminine, majority/minority, innocence/initiation, natural/artificial, new/old, growth/decay, urbane/provincial, health/illness, same/different, cognition/paranoia, art/kitsch, sincerity/sentimentality, and voluntary/addiction' (Sedgwick, 1990:72). These pairings are of very different things and such an approach manifestly creates a 'grand narrative'. As suggested in Chapter Two, the problem with 'meta-narratives' is not so much that they are 'wrong' in themselves, rather they paradoxically often 'denarrativise' the very things they are seeking to explain. Because Halperin's account of discourses of homophobia is structured through the binary of heterosexuality/homosexuality, he is unable to account adequately for

the *historicity* and *relationality* involved in the oppression of homosexual people. His approach, reliant as it is on the abstract binary of heterosexuality/homosexuality, does not incorporate the kind of conceptual narrativity that more adequately accounts for social life.

In this context an approach embodying conceptual narrativity, requires that theorists of homosexuality and homophobic power turn their attention to 'relational settings'. The notion of a heterosexual/homosexual binary captures an element of relationality, but it remains located at an abstract level disconnected from the material and institutional nature of power. Both Steven Seidman (1993, 1995) and Rosemary Hennessy (1995) draw attention to the effects of focusing on the epistemological level. They argue, in slightly different ways, that queer theory 'undertheorises the social' and suffers from a 'textual idealism' (Seidman, 1995). For example Seidman argues that Sedgwick fails to link cultural meanings to 'social structural arrangements or processes such as nationalism, colonialism, globalization, or dynamics of class or family formation or popular social movements' (Seidman, 1995:134). The significance that queer theory gives to homophobia as essentially a cultural and, in particular, knowledge-based strategy, leads to a lack of attention being paid to the *institutional* nature of power and its connection to other *material relations* of, for example, the division of labour or wealth, and social resources like health and health care (Hennessy, 1995:149). As Hennessy argues, these are undoubtedly discursively mediated but their materiality is not simply discursive: 'The ways of making sense of sexuality that are dispersed through institutions like the military, churches, or the media also depend on and condition divisions of labor and are affected by the operations of particular state and national formations' (Hennessy, 1995:149). These critiques might be taken as further support for Connell's argument, discussed in Chapter Two, that sexuality is best understood as 'neither nature nor discourse, but as a sphere of social practices that constitute social relations' (Connell, 1995a:390). For his part, Halperin makes the same kind of elisions as Sedgwick and talks in only the most general terms about homophobic discourses. Their concrete institutional, historical and relational connections to family, church, school, the state and so on, disappear in the focus at an abstract and symbolic level of the hetero/homo binary. Hennessy's suggestions about a more appropriate method of historicising social practices seem appropriate here:

> Historicizing starts by acknowledging that the continuation of social life depends on its (re)production in various spheres. As a mode of reading, it traces connections between and among these spheres at several levels of analysis - connecting particular conjunctural arrangements in a social formation to more far-reaching ones (Hennessy, 1995:150).

As suggested earlier, one of the distinguishing features of the queer theoretical approach to questions of sexuality and homophobia is the shift away from exploring questions of an ontological nature to focusing on the level of epistemology. The theoretical discourse of an early gay liberation, and the more recent social constructionist debate, approached the question of homosexual oppression and liberation in terms of questions about the status of what a homosexual or gay person 'is' in relation to their psychological, subjective, social and moral attributes, and the ways in which power stops individuals from expressing these qualities in their lives. Halperin, on the other hand, follows a Foucauldian and queer *nominalism* in which discourses produce 'the homosexual' and 'the heterosexual'. Halperin does not deny the 'reality' of these constructions, but queries whether there is anything objective or natural that can be known. There are two main problems with the way in which Halperin expresses this notion. The first has already been discussed in Chapter Two in relation to Foucault's formulation of 'sexuality' where it was argued that there is some kind of 'real', and somatic bodily processes, that are the site of cultural shaping.

Another difficulty with Halperin's discussions about the nature of homosexual subjectivity concerns the slippage that occurs between a *professed* nominalism, (that there is nothing 'original' or 'essential' which pre-exists the discursive production of homosexual and heterosexual subjects), and Halperin's own explanation that refers to notions like the 'slanders and fantasies' told about homosexuals, and the de-authorisation of the 'subjective experiences' of homosexuals. So, on the one hand, it is a 'mug's game' to try to refute the 'lies of homophobia' because they are ultimately contradictory, often cancelling each other out. But on the other hand, discourses of homophobia are slanderous fantasies. Such language suggests that there is some 'truth' which is non-slanderous and non-fantastical that can be known about and by, homosexuals. Halperin cannot but perform a similar kind of 'ontological gerrymandering' that was earlier identified in Foucault's theory. For the queer theorist a discourse is 'homophobic' to the extent that it denies, or distorts, or destroys the

'homo'. This 'homo' is a person who, while constituted through discourses, is not reducible to those discourses. Halperin's language suggests that there is some 'thing' that is not wholly caught up in the discursive production of sexual identity. There has to be some understanding of a need or want or experience or truth that is *not only* the product of the 'murderously pathologizing' discourses if we are to understand what it is that the discourse 'pathologizes'. Why object to these discourses unless there is some understanding of the subject that is not only shaped, but also damaged by them. The damage must surely be to someone, who has some 'thing' worth preserving intact and undamaged. Such a conclusion supports Taylor's view that politics should be based upon the recognition of some 'authentic' aspect of the self, that can be damaged, and that deserves to be protected from such 'disrespect'.

Halperin argues that critique should not focus on the *content* of homophobic discourses but on the *formal* contradictory quality of discourses of homosexuality and heterosexuality. His silence on the *content* of such discourses therefore neglects to address the particular ways in which homophobic discourses do their work. He believes that it is pointless to try to refute the particular discourses of homophobia. Instead he advocates a *reversal* of the constitutive binary, so that heterosexuality becomes an object of knowledge and homosexuality the subject of knowledge. The reversal that Halperin seeks is not simply a mirror image of the homophobic discourse. It is an 'unexpected, dynamic, and open-ended movement whose ultimate effects extend beyond its immediate tactics' (Halperin, 1995:60). The key reversal that Halperin seeks aims 'to treat homosexuality as a position from which one *can* know, to treat it as a legitimate *condition* of knowledge' (Halperin, 1995:60). What is rejected is the search for more 'adequate' knowledge about gay people, what they are 'really' like and so on. Instead gay politics must produce 'political histories of the production of truth' (Halperin, 1995:52) in which the homophobic strategies that seek to 'de-authorise' gay people are identified and shown for what they are - i.e. murderously slanderous. Just as Foucault in his political practice through organisations like GIP sought the empowerment of prisoners through encouraging them to speak their 'truth', so Halperin argues that gay people who speak, not in the sense of revealing some 'truth' about themselves, but as 'authorising gay knowledge practices' and disrupting 'heterosexist monopolies of heterosexual "free expression"' (Halperin, 1995:206), are engaging in a politics of resistance.

This position sounds remarkably like a standpoint position - 'homosexuality ... is .. an eccentric positionality to be exploited and explored: a potentially privileged site for the criticism and analysis of cultural discourses' (Halperin, 1995:61).

> Foucault's treatment of homosexuality as strategic position instead of a psychological essence opens up the possibility of a gay science without objects, of a *queer studies* founded not on the positive fact of homosexuality (and therefore not possessed of a conventional claim to legitimate authority grounded in a privileged access to truth) but on an on-going process of gay self-knowing and self-formation (Halperin, 1995:122).

This approach to resisting the suppression of otherness that Halperin argues is entailed in the hetero/homo binary, ends up slipping onto a critical terrain that Halperin wishes to avoid. In order to delegitimate heterosexuality, the critic has to say something specific about what heterosexuality is and in so doing enter the terrain of an examination of particular discourses - which may be, in varying degrees, distorting or authentic. Here Charles Taylor's critique of Foucault's theory of truth is enlightening. Taylor argues that real debate about the truth and power effects of discourses has to start with 'the fine-grained discernment of what has been gained, and what lost, and what doors to otherness we have closed, and how much they can be opened again without destroying ourselves' (Taylor, 1985:383). Here Taylor hints at his preference for recognising that reason is not wholly captured within a disciplinary society and that practical reason involves reasoning in transitions: 'where one can do violence by distortion, may one not alleviate by a *less unfaithful description*' (Taylor, 1985:380 - my emphasis). In the context of an analysis of homophobic discourses, this suggests that it is too soon to give up discussion about the content of such discourses. It may not be the complete solution to homophobia to push for discursive and legal change so that homosexual behaviour is no longer seen as illegal, but it is surely better than a continuation in criminality.

One of the outcomes of a refusal to take the *content* of discourse seriously is that the gendered nature of the hetero/homo binary is neglected. Many queer texts, including the work of Sedgwick and Halperin, focus on male homosexuality. The theoretical understandings that they construct of the hetero/homo binary therefore suffers from a form of masculine, substitutionalist universalism. The experience of female homosexuality in terms of the associated forms of oppression and exclusion, have been different from those experienced by men. The content of homophobic discourse and the institutional forms of

homosexual oppression are necessary in order to account adequately for both lesbian experience and to explain the *gendered* nature of male homosexuality.

Queer Politics and the Limits of Identity

> Foucault's approach also opens up .. the possibility of a queer politics defined not by the struggle to liberate a common, repressed, preexisting nature but by an ongoing process of *self-constitution and self-transformation* - a queer politics anchored in the perilous and shifting sands of *non-identity*, positionality, discursive reversibility, and collective self-invention (Halperin, 1995:122 - my emphasis).

Having identified what he sees as key homophobic discourses and the overall heteronormative strategy by which they operate, Halperin suggests that the appropriate political response is a politics of resistance, which works by *reversing* the dominant cultural logic located in the heterosexual/homosexual binary. This is accomplished through the intellectual critical work of deconstructing the oppressive binary, as discussed in the previous section, and also through the construction of a queer identity which is an 'identity without an essence'. Before turning to Halperin's model of queer politics, I briefly outline the broader queer critique of identity. In the second part of this section I outline Halperin's construction of a sexual and political identity around 'queer'. Halperin argues that this is to be understood as a *marginal positionality*, which leads to a politics focused on *resistance* rather than inclusion. In general the queer critique of identity politics builds on an already existing debate on 'the Left' (including feminists, gay theorists, people of colour etc) about the viability of political interventions on the basis of 'categorical' identities. While Halperin does not explicitly critique identity politics, his statements in favour of a politics of resistance are predicated on just such an analysis. In the third part of this section I extend the critique of Halperin and suggest an alternative to queer politics of resistance through a reconceptualisation of identity in relation to 'narrative identity' and politics of recognition.

The Queer Critique of Identity

Queer theory is critical of the identity politics that has characterised liberationist and ethnic forms of gay sexual politics for two main reasons. Queer theory is critical of the way in which the 'identities' of gay men and lesbians have been conceptualised as a unitary, non-differentiated category. Therefore the critique of identity politics suggests that 'no matter how sensitively we go about it, "identity politics" has great difficulty in affirming *difference(s)*' (Cohen, 1991:76 - my emphasis). Secondly, identity politics is damned for being a politics of *inclusion* that seeks the incorporation or assimilation of gay and lesbian people into a largely unchanged sexual and social polity. Such a politics clearly violates the queer maxim that *resistance to the hetero-norm* is what signifies a truly radical gay politic. Moreover, this search for inclusion succeeds only (on those occasions when it does succeed) by *excluding* others from the rewards of straight society.

On the first point, queer theorists are critical of the way that attempts to recognise differences within the categories of 'lesbian' and 'gay' have often ended up conceptualising 'difference' in much the same way as identity has been understood. Ed Cohen summarises well the way in which identity-based gay politics disconcerts many of its so-called 'natural' constituents.

> So, although the assumption that "we" constitute a "natural" community because we share a sexual identity might appear to offer a stable basis for group formations, my experience suggests that it can just as often interrupt the process of creating intellectual and political projects which can gather "us" together across time and space. By predicating "our" affinity upon the assertion of a common "sexuality", we tacitly agree to leave unexplored any "internal" contradictions which undermine the coherence we desire from the imagined certainty of an unassailable commonality or of incontestable sexuality (Cohen, 1991:72).

The contradictions are internal to both the *collective* 'gay' and 'lesbian' political subjects, as well as to *individual* subjectivities. Therefore for queer theorists such as Judith Butler (1990), Diana Fuss (1989) and Ed Cohen (1991), *difference* is at the very heart of identity. Where identity politics are premised upon the 'sameness' of those being organised, it misses the point that identity always comes at the price of an exclusion of the Other. It follows that an identity, such as 'gay' or 'lesbian', is not exhaustive. It cannot represent all the differences that can be manifested through the sexual desires, practices and relationships that an individual experiences.

Diana Fuss has argued that rather than seeing identity as 'self-presence' it should be conceptualised *as* difference (1989:103). This postmodern perspective conceptualises identity *as* difference, that is identity is an effect of language, and it is therefore always contingent and provisional. There is no 'essence' to this identity, only what comes to the subject through positioning in language and the symbolic codes of culture. With this conceptualisation of the self postmodernists reject a notion of identity as 'self-transparent' and singular. Rather, many queer theorists prefer to understand the attributes of sexual selfhood through Judith Butler's notion of performativity. This concept is seen as a better way to conceptualise how individuals embody, negotiate, create and/or resist the subject positions offered to them through discourse. Butler developed this concept, to explain gender as something other than a role or identity category that existed on top of a pre-existing biological sex. Gender as performative is 'neither free play nor theoretical self-presentation' (Butler, 1993:95) but refers to:

> a process of iterability, a regularized and constrained repetition of norms. And this repetition is not performed *by* a sujbect; this repetition is what enables a subject and constitutes the temporal condition for the subject. This iterability implies that "performance" is not a singular "act" or event, but a ritualized production, a ritual reiterated under and through constraint (Butler, 1993:95).

Such an understanding of gender leads Butler to the conclusion that feminism is mistaken in taking 'women' as the grounding identity category for politics. Like Foucault's 'sexuality', 'woman' is a fictive unity, more particularly a regulatory fiction.

Butler's ideas have been picked up by some queer theorists as they seek to explain how 'the identity categories we inhabit determine our knowledge and everyday ways of being in the world' (Jagose, 1996:91). From such a position 'gay identity' is a problematic concept that might be better rejected, given that '"Homosexual" like "woman" is not a name that refers to a natural kind of thing' (Halperin, 1995:45). Queer theory also questions whether or not *stability* of identity amongst political subjects is necessary for a viable politics. For example, Diana Fuss suggests that 'a view of identity as unstable and potentially disruptive, as alien and incoherent, could in the end produce a more mature identity politics by militating against the tendency to erase differences and inconsistencies in the production of stable political subjects' (Fuss, 1989:104).

This 'more mature identity politics' is based upon resistance and transgression, rather than either transformation or liberation. Queer is not a unified identity, but is characterised by its opposition to heteronormativity. The goal of queer politics is to destablise heterosexuality rather than to naturalise gay identities. Leo Bersani makes the case for a transgressive politic strongly:

> There are some glorious precedents for thinking of homosexuality as truly disruptive - as a *force* not limited to the modest goals of tolerance for diverse lifestyles, but in fact mandating the politically unacceptable and politically indispensable choice of an outlaw existence (Bersani, 1995:76).

The Empowerment of a Marginal Positionality: 'A Little Manifesto in Defense of Queer Identities'[8]

Halperin builds on the queer critique of identity politics. Like other queer theorists he does not endorse the *naturalisation* of gay and lesbian identities through a politics of recognition, but rather promotes the idea that gay politics must be primarily a politics of resistance to the heteronormative. Queer theorists reject the phrase 'gay is good' because such a political slogan works within an 'identitarian logic'. It assumes that there are gay people who are transparent to themselves, who possess some kind of gay 'essence' and who seek recognition for this gayness. From a queer perspective, such an approach is misguided because it accepts as given and unproblematic the heterosexual/homosexual binary. Rather than suggesting that homosexual people should organise on the basis of a unitary identity, the 'centre' for a gay politics can be located through 'assuming and empowering a *marginal* positionality - not in rehabilitating an already demarcated, if devalued identity, but in taking advantage of the purely oppositional location homosexuality has been made to occupy' (Halperin, 1995:61 - my emphasis). This form of politics assumes that its subject - the homosexual - is 'an identity without an essence' (Halperin, 1995:61).[9] The identity of 'homosexual' comes from its distance from heterosexuality. Homosexual identity is constituted oppositionally by *where* it stands rather than *what* it is. Such an understanding of homosexuality is now incorporated

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8   See Halperin (1995:66).

9.   This notion of identity places queer theory as part of a larger postmodernist critique that calls for 'a "post-essentialist" reconceptualisation of notions of identity' (Appiah and Gates, 1995:1). In relation to gay and lesbian politics see also Diana Fuss (1989:102), who argues that it is possible to 'base on identity on something other than essence'.

under the sign 'queer'.

> Queer is by definition *whatever* is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. *there is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers.* ... "Queer", then, demarcates not a positivity but a positionality vis-a-vis the normative - a positionality that is not restricted to lesbians and gay men but is in fact available to anyone who is or who feels marginalized because of her or his sexual practice (Halperin, 1995:62).

The queer subject therefore has no necessary content in terms of practice, relationship, sexual object choice, desire and so on. However because of her or his privileged relation in opposition to the heteronormative an individual may be able to create different possibilities for the way that sexual desires, relationships, gender constructions and so on are ordered. For some queer theorists this implies that same-sex desire, practice and/or identity is not necessary to a queer politics. There can be 'queer straights' who challenge heteronormative values.

However, there are limits for Halperin in the political efficacy of 'queer'. One issue for him is the way that the term is sometimes used to give a false impression of inclusiveness, that is:

> of embracing in equal measure all species of sexual outlaws. It thereby promotes the misleading notion that a queer solidarity has decisively triumphed over historical divisions between lesbians and gay men (or between lesbians and gay men, on the one hand, and [for example] sadomasochists, fetishists, pederasts, and transgender people, on the other) and that differences of race or gender no longer pose political problems for queer unity that require urgently to be addressed (Halperin, 1995:64).

Of perhaps more serious concern for Halperin is the fact that the term queer, originally connected to a certain oppositional and resistant homosexual politic, has now for some been emptied of any specifically *homosexual* content. What was suggested as an exemplary feature of queer (that is, its lack of any definitional content) can also open it to appropriation by non-homosexuals who 'do not experience the *unique* political disabilities and forms of social disqualification from which lesbians and gay men routinely suffer in virtue of [their] sexuality' (Halperin, 1995:65 - my emphasis). Leo Bersani has made a similar point in his book *Homos,* where he is scathing of those writers (among whom he numbers the earlier Halperin of *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality*) who 'in rejecting the essentializing identities derived from sexual preference, .. mount a resistance to homophobia in which the agent of resistance has been erased: there is no longer any homosexual subject to oppose the homophobic subject' (Bersani, 1995:56).

Notwithstanding these weaknesses in the 'queer' position, Halperin is still committed to his 'little manifesto in defense of it' (Halperin, 1995:66). He believes that it retains a radical potential for gay politics, because it provides an opportunity to reverse the logic of homophobic discourses and to provide subject positions that have no necessary content but take their meaning and definition from 'a resistance to the norm' (Halperin, 1995:66). Through resisting this norm, new queer identities open up a space for the creation of new identities, new relationships and new cultural forms (Halperin, 1995:67). They are a means of articulating in contemporary political life what Foucault referred to as an ethics commited to an 'aesthetics of existence'.

Narrative Sexual Identities and the Politics of Recognition

Halperin's account of the queer politics of resistance turns on his advocacy of particular understandings of both identity and politics. On the first issue, Halperin makes much of the notion of queer as an identity *without an essence*, and as such it inhabits a marginal *positionality*. Here I will explore the problems associated with theorising a sexual political identity in terms of positionality. I argue that sexual identities *do* possess some positivity which can be associated with their 'narrativity'. Secondly, I will address the question of whether a politics of resistance, and transgression is an adequate means by which the power used against homosexuals might be opposed. In place of a politics of resistance I suggest that recognition is absolutely central to politics - even to those forms of politics that characterise themselves as being concerned with resisting dominant power forms.

The queer critique of identity politics that was addressed above was in part a critique of what have been called 'categorical' identities. This construction of queer as 'positionality' is only one response to an admittedly problematic conceptualisation of identities in categorical terms. However, there are alternative constructions of identity that address both the difficulties associated with categorical identities as well as the problems with Halperin's version of queer as a positional identity. Indeed, it can be argued that a sociologist's vision is required, and that it is important to see identity formation as something more than a positioning of selves in relation to binary divisions.

What is striking about Halperin's definition of queer as a marginal positionality, is its 'formal' nature and lack of content. Halperin believes that this is an advantage, because he argues that it escapes the problems associated with the heterosexual/homosexual binary that strives to identify, categorise and marginalise homosexuality in all its forms. However, the notion of a queer identity without any positivity seems remarkably disembedded and disembodied.[10] I would suggest that a queer marginal positionality is a species of what Charles Taylor has called a 'punctual self' - one disassociated from the defining relationships that people are embedded in as sisters, brothers, lovers, mothers, fathers, wives, husbands, workers and so on. Each of these relationships is also situated within definite class, gender, ethnic, religious etc locations. Identities, to be successful, require recognition by self and others. We cannot escape our dependency on others for our sense of self, for what is significant to us and for our place in the world. Halperin's queer positionality employs only a limited notion of relationality. A queer identity is positioned in relation to a cultural logic, to a meta-Other but not in relation to actual human beings, with whom we have to negotiate the messy business of living. Positionality fails to account for the on-going way in which defining identity continues, both inwardly and outwardly, through dialogue with significant others (Taylor, 1994:34).

An additional and connected difficulty with such a model of the self, is that it marginalises the *narrative* aspect of identities. As already suggested in Chapter Two, it may be helpful to think about identities in terms of their relationship to narrativity as an ontological condition of social life. Identities from this perspective are projects which are lived and have an orientation to action and to the future (Calhoun, 1995:221). The capacity for social action and the construction of collective identities is dependent upon being embedded within evaluative frameworks or hypergoods (Taylor, 1989:51). This is as true for queer subjects as for anyone else. There is no identity, personal or collective, that can exist outside our relationships with others and our sense of what is important to us. The notion of positionality is unable to capture this fundamental aspect of human identity and agency. On the other hand, a narrative approach to the question of identity does acknowledge the way in which people construct their identities within sets of narratives (Somers, 1994:614). Queer identity

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10.   And as suggested in the previous section, it is a position that Halperin himself cannot maintain for long.

as positionality, as a willingly chosen marginality with no specific content, is unlikely to provide a sufficiently strong set of moral evaluations for many people, because it is dislocated from the sources of meaning in people's lives. Where it *does* provide a *modus operandi* for political action (as it must do for some, otherwise there would be none of the heated debate about its viability as an appropriate political identity for 'homosexuals'), it can only do so through its attachment to positivity of some kind. Indeed Halperin himself acknowledges that for queer to give up some reference to 'homosexuality' would be to produce a flattening of sexual difference and to lose what is specific to heteronormativity as a source of homophobic power.

Halperin's ideal of the queer subject opposed to heteronormativity is tied to a politics of resistance. For him, what is politically potent is that which refuses the heteronormative. However, the particular form and content of this politics of resistance is left unspecified. Halperin's only suggestions about what might come under that name are practices which act to resignify and appropriate homophobic discourses for 'queer' ends. Halperin gives as examples of this, the naming of a new gay club in San Francisco as 'Club Hypothalamus'[11] (Halperin, 1995:48), and he discusses an issue of the *San Francisco Bay Times* which reversed a *Newsweek* cover story on lesbians[12] by producing a mythical *Dykeweek* that queried the limits of tolerance to heterosexuals. For Halperin, then, politics in the sense of collective action for demanding rights, overturning unjust laws, ending discrimination and so is of little benefit to gay people. Halperin's politics of resistance is rather narrowly defined as including *discursive reversals* and favouring an 'aesthetics of existence'. The ethical aspect of queer politics will be the concern of the next section. However, before exploring that, I want to suggest that the politics of resistance that Halperin and other queer theorists advocate misses out on some of the benefits that might be gained from the recognition of 'recognition'.

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11.   After Simon LeVay's study which purported to show that sexual orientation was neurologically determined.

12.   The *Newsweek* story argued that lesbianism might be *tolerated* within certain limits.

Drawing on the work of Taylor (1994) and Calhoun (1995), I have argued that recognition is vital in the creation and maintenance of identities, and therefore that some form of identity politics is necessary, and necessarily concerned with recognition. Taylor argues that 'our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the *mis*recognition of others, and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves' (Taylor, 1994:25). Such a thesis is built around the notion that it is important to recognise that the modern individual identity incorporates an ideal of 'authenticity' (Taylor, 1994:28). The problem for some identities is that they have been denied recognition. Any 'inwardly derived, personal, original identity doesn't enjoy this recognition *a priori*. It has to win it through exchange, and the attempt can fail' (Taylor, 1994:34-5). Calhoun, for his part, argues that the failure of identities to achieve recognition is linked to social discourses that tell us what is appropriate or valuable for us to be, and in so doing may 'distort' or negate the ways of being we want for ourselves. In this way Calhoun makes a claim similar to the queer critique, but he does not endorse the idea that identities should therefore automatically be 'deconstructed', because of some theoretical 'first principle'. Rather, whether an identity is deconstructed or claimed, is a decision that should be based upon 'strategic considerations... to speak of identity is not always simply or only to repress. The operations of deconstructing and claiming coexist only in tension, but they may need nonetheless always to coexist and inform each other' (Calhoun, 1995:214). Identification of some kind is unavoidable in politics. A political strategy starts from the recognition and mobilisation of some identifiable group of individuals, but in the process of political action these identities may change and/or give rise to new forms of identity. Such a process is premised upon some kind of 'we' that is at least provisionally unified in its attempts to bring about change (Weeks, 1995:101).

One of the implications of the queer political response is that a 'politics of difference' rather than of 'equal respect' is seen as the most appropriate response to heteronormative power. This politics rejects the quest for inclusion into the rights and rewards of 'straight society', because it is assumed that such a politics of equal respect would necessarily obliterate difference, and in the process further marginalise 'homosexuals'. While there is undoubtedly

some truth in this, it is also important to recognise that by seeking to *expand* who is included under claims for equal respect under the law and in social life, the very ideals may have to change and so become less constraining. In expanding who has access to citizenship rights, the nature of the polity and social structure has to change. For example, the expansion of women's rights has seen not just women's inclusion into a male sphere, but has also involved rethinking how certain aspects of the social world are organised. In the realm of work, there are indications that the demands of women have not only lead to inclusion, but also to more fundamental changes in the way that work is organised.[13]

One of the recurrent critiques of queer politics is that it is ultimately elitist (see Seidman, 1995 and Hennessey, 1995). Queer politics is seen as a possibility only for those relatively privileged individuals who already possess some measure of social and political power. For many gay men and lesbians, an active resistance to the heteronormative might exclude them from access to resources that they need in order to make further claims, which might indeed include resistance. Queer sexual radicalism begins to appear rather narrow and unacceptably marginalised from effecting broad-ranging social change.

Queer Ethics: An Aesthetics of Existence

The queer politic that Halperin outlined in relation to resistance finds its ethical elaboration in Foucault's ideas about the aesthetics of existence. This politic is clearly far removed from the dominant ethic of authenticity, associated with either a liberationist or 'ethnic' gay and lesbian politics. In contrast, the model of an aesthetics of existence promotes an understanding of freedom as 'personal autonomy' (Halperin, 1995:74) in which homosexuals, through technologies of self, seek and create their own self-transformation. It is argued that this self-transformation enables lesbians and gay men 'to detach ourselves from heteronormative society, so as to be able to lead our queer lives without apology or compromise, and to continue to forge new and better ways of being queer' (Halperin, 1995:108). Halperin makes his claims for a new, queer way of life by elaborating on Foucault's ideas about ethics as an aesthetics of existence. Aspects of Foucault's position

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13.   An example of this in New Zealand is the way that some organisations have begun to take seriously, through 'family-friendly policies', the fact that their workers are also parents and have responsibilities outside work.

in this regard, have already been outlined in Chapter Two. In the following two sections I briefly outline, then critique, the way that Halperin attempts to turn Foucault's ethics towards a contemporary queer ethics.

A Queer Ascesis

Foucault developed his ideas about an aesthetics of existence in relation to his studies of classical Greek and Roman ethics. Foucault sees in these classical ethics a more appropriate and 'freer' means of living one's life than modern ethics, which work by imposing universal moral principles on individuals who are entreated to be obedient to 'the dictates of reason, virtue, conscience, or the law' (Halperin, 1995:71). For Foucault, and therefore Halperin also, such norms are normalising and disciplining. In contrast, an aesthetics of existence is an 'ethical practice' that provides a 'procedure' through which individuals aim to live 'a beautiful and praiseworthy life' (Halperin, 1995:69). The aim of such an ethical practice therefore is not that an individual should adhere to a set of moral principles, but that they are involved in a *process* by which they 'not only set themselves rules of conduct but also seek to *transform themselves*, to change themselves in their singular being, and to make their life into a work of art ... that carries certain *aesthetic values* and meets certain *stylistic criteria*' (Foucault in Halperin, 1995:69 - my emphasis). While Foucault's main focus of study was the classical era, he saw in the aesthetics of existence a potential model for the freeing of homosexuals from an oppressive regime, in which the truth of the self is tied to notions of indwelling desire. An aesthetics of existence is characterised by its focus on the 'self's relation to the self'. This is a mode of activity that is concerned with *self-transformation*. Personal autonomy from this perspective is developed through certain stylistic means and therefore involves a set of values that are primarily *aesthetic* (Halperin, 1995:74).

In an aesthetics of existence, the main goal of ethical conduct is to *transform* the self 'in accordance with one's own conception of beauty or value' (Halperin, 1995:70). This is a procedural rather than a substantive ethic. It matters less what *ends* or *goods* one seeks, but rather to be ethical is to be in a constant state of *becoming* and to be engaged in *work* on the self. Foucault is adamant that a *stylistics* of self provides the conditions that are necessary for the development of personal *autonomy*. Such autonomy requires a particular kind of

relationship to the self, that is developed through transformative technologies of the self. According to Halperin, this conception of the self is an 'impersonal' one, and while Foucault did not explicitly discuss the self in these terms, nevertheless his writings about the care of the self 'strongly implied such an impersonal understanding of it' (Halperin, 1995:74). Care of the self and modern technologies of the self are not concerned with 'self-realisation' or 'discovering one's true self', but with the transformation of self in order to actualise or instantiate 'an impersonal essence - a generalized moral quality such as self-restraint ... for example, or an intellectual capacity such as "reason"' (Halperin, 1995:75). The self in this view is 'the site of a radical alterity: it is the space within each human being where she or he encounters the not-self' (Halperin, 1995:75). The aim of self-transformation is therefore to become other than what one is - perhaps even to escape 'one's social and psychological determinations' (Halperin, 1995:76). Ascesis is the technique of cultivating a self that *transcends* the self.

For Foucault and Halperin, the ethical injuction to become *other* than what one is, through technologies of self-transformation are real possibilites by means of the practice of gay sex and relationships. Homosexuality is to be understood as a modern version of 'ascesis' - that is a form of ethical work, not unlike 'training' in the athletic sense (Halperin, 1995:76). 'Homosexuality is not a psychological condition that we *discover* but a way of being that we *practice* in order to redefine the meaning of who we are and what we do, and in order to make ourselves and our world more gay' (Halperin, 1995:78 - my emphasis). Foucault's thoughts on this subject are used to support Halperin's view that 'queer' is a place from which gay people can transform themselves and more particularly can marginalise the self from heteronormativity. Queer offers the potential for a new way of life that resists the discourses of homophobia and the epistemology of the closet. This new way of life can be developed through new forms of existence - in particular through new pleasures and new relationships. Both offer ways of escaping 'the ready-made formulas already available to us - formulas which offer no alternative to purely sexual encounters, on the one hand, and the merging of identities in love, on the other' (Halperin, 1995:81). Both forms of existence require the *work* of ascesis or 'spiritual exercise' through which self-transformation (in pleasurable experiences and relationships) takes place.

Halperin discusses Foucault's argument, that new forms of pleasure can be found in sadomasochistic practices and in the practice of fist-fucking. Particularly through the latter, Foucault argued that the creation of new pleasures might help to displace the workings of desire as part of the regulative function of 'sexuality'. A focus on the search for *pleasure* is seen as a better mode for sexual relations because it is desubjectivating and impersonal - 'it shatters identity, subjectivity, and dissolves the subject, however fleetingly, into the sensorial continuum of the body, into the unconscious dreaming of the mind' (Halperin, 1995:95). This is in contrast to *desire,* which is assumed to be expressive of personal identity, history and individuality (and as such is tied into modern bio-power through the working of discourses of sexuality). In addition, we should resist the idea that 'desire and identity are unitary and stable features of the individual person' (Halperin, 1995:95). Such a view of the self is problematic, because it 'functions as an object both of social regulation and of personal administration' (Halperin, 1995:95). Doctors, psychologists and others become agencies of normalisation through such a personal, unitary and identitarian notion of the self.

In place of sex-desire, Foucault situates 'bodies and pleasures' as the appropriate point of resistance to the apparatus of sexuality. Halperin agrees:

> The transformative power of the queer sexual practices that gay men have invented reveals in this context something of its political efficacy: through the invention of novel, intense, and scattered bodily pleasures, queer culture brings about a tactical reversal of the mechanisms of sexuality, making strategic use of power differentials, physical sensations, and sexual identity-categories in order to create a queer praxis that ultimately dispenses with "sexuality" and destabilizes the very constitution of identity itself (Halperin, 1995:96-7).

Halperin goes so far as to suggest that the subject of sexuality has to be *shattered.* In so doing a new impersonal self is able to go about its business of 'ongoing ethical elaboration' (Halperin, 1995:97). Clearly the goal of queer ethics is *continual* transformation, for the sake of transformation, rather than for some desired goal.

Halperin's original contribution to a queer ethic is the manner in which he articulates an aesthetic of existence in relation to the phenomenon of gay male body-building. He makes a spirited defence of this activity as 'truly an "art of existence"' because

> it is a strenuous, demanding, and transformative daily ritual which often alters the entire shape of one's life - including one's diet, routine, patterns of work and sleep,

friendships, social habits, sense of community, and sense of personal possibilities (Halperin, 1995:116).

Moreover, there is a crucial distinction between gay male body styles and heteronormative ones. Straight male bodies are primarily 'tools' - they are meant to be used for work or to intimidate weaker men or women. In contrast, gay male bodies are primarily 'image' - they are developed in order to become the object of desire and in so doing 'they deliberately flaunt the visual norms of straight masculinity, which impose discretion on masculine self-display and require that straight male beauty exhibit itself only casually or inadvertently, that it refuse to acknowledge its own strategies' (Halperin, 1995:117).

A Critique of Queer Ethics

There are four aspects of Halperin's suggestions for a queer aesthetics of existence that I wish to explore more critically. Firstly, the focus on ethics as essentially an event of transformation, exposes the procedural rationality that underpins it. Secondly, the notion of ascesis as spiritual exercise requiring the work of selves is plagued by some of the limitations of a 'work model of activity' (Benhabib, 1986). Thirdly, the model of self as an 'impersonal self' can be constrasted with the notions of authenticity and narrative identity. Finally, the model of freedom proffered by this form of ethics is based on 'personal autonomy' and as such is monological. I will contrast this with Weeks' (1995) notion of democratic autonomy.

There is a tension in Halperin's ideas about an appropriate queer ethics. On the one hand, he comments favourably on Foucault's notion of an aesthetics of existence with its focus on an ethical responsibility to *transform* the self (and this can be seen in the quotation above about body-building [p116]). On the other hand, there is some *content* to this self-transformation that is privileged. A gay man develops certain muscles in order to be an object of desire. If he ended up looking like a straight male body builder this ethical practice would not be very 'queer'. There is, then, something of a contradiction between the more formal comments made about queer ethics as primarily self-*transformation* and a slippage onto particular outcomes. Insofar as Halperin and Foucault emphasise that there is no substantive content, style, form of self, or ethical behaviour that is to be endorsed (except that the self should be engaged in a continual process of change), I reiterate the point made in Chapter Two that they produce a postmodern version of procedural rationality.

A queer procedural morality emphasises that what is 'right' is for individuals to submit themselves to the *procedures* involved in various technologies of self. The focus is on the fact that individuals exercise their will through these techniques and spiritual exercises. To the extent that Halperin and other queer theorists focus on *self-transformation* per se, they are not able to explain why individuals might choose one form of technology of the self over another, nor why some technologies might be 'better' than others. In relation to Halperin's example of gay body-building, there is no justification given as to why altering the shape of one's entire life (in sleep, diet, routine etc) is a 'good' thing. It is possible that such a form of ascesis may take one away from previous and significant relationships. It may lead to a distorted emphasis on body shape to the exclusion of the quality of relationships. There is no guidance from either Foucault or Halperin about how we might judge these practices, except that they should not be heteronormative. This model of a queer 'good' is rather 'thin'.

The second problem with 'homosexual ascesis' has to do with the notion that such spiritual exercise is primarily an activity characterised by the 'labour' or work of the participants. As such it is a form of 'performative-expressivist action' in which the self-enhancement of the actor is the main rationale for the action (Benhabib, 1986:139). Under such a model of activity there is little recognition of any 'others' who may or may not act in concert with the self's intentions, desires and purposes. According to Benhabib, expressivist action is therefore unable to capture the dimension of human action through which there are 'other subjects with whom we have to *communicate* and to whom we have to *justify* our purposes and intentions' (Benhabib, 1986:137). An example of this can be found in Halperin's curious interpretation of Foucault's thoughts about the ancient cultivation of the self. Halperin argues that the cultivation of the self does not represent 'personal self-absorption', rather it is to be understood as 'a set of elaborate and rigorous practices designed to produce a heightened scrutiny of oneself, a constant monitoring of one's behavior and dispositions, a holistic and therapeutic regimen of mind and body' (Halperin, 1995:70). I would argue that it is difficut *not* to interpret this as a classically self-absorbed ethic. There is no reference to any others or to a broader set of ethical concerns beyond that of self-satisfaction. Therefore, queer spiritual exercise does not sufficiently embody the dialogical nature of human action,

nor does it value mutual recognition as a form of freedom. Instead, it employs a problematic philosophy of the subject in which the individual will is paramount. This form of personal autonomy is therefore a species of aesthetics - a stylistics - in which a philosophy of the subject 'privileges an objectifying attitude in which the "knowing subject" regards its self and other individuals as it would passive entitities in the external world' (McNay, 1992:166). Here ethics becomes primarily a matter of self-mastery and authorial creation and it valorises a view of the self as a sexual monad 'accountable only to the dictates of our personal tastes and dispositions, and hence [abstracted] entirely from questions of inter-personal dependency and need' (Soper, 1993:38).

Halperin suggests that the purpose of self-transformation is to become 'other than what one is' (Halperin, 1995:76). The self here is an 'impersonal' one that should not be understood as the 'seat of our personality' (Halperin, 1995:106). It is through ascesis that we are able to 'cultivate in ourselves the ability to surpass ourselves, to enter into our own futurity' (Halperin, 1995:106). Such a self has had its identity 'shattered' and its subjectivity 'decentred' through 'intense bodily pleasure, detached from its exclusive localization in the genitals and regionalized throughout various zones of the body' (Halperin, 1995:97). This shattering and decentring is assumed to be a good thing because it allows the possibility of a more impersonal self that 'can function as the substance of ongoing ethical elaboration' (Halperin, 1995:97). This understanding of the ethical is at least partly dependent on the modern quest for 'authenticity'. This may appear a strange claim to make of a Nietzschean-derived ethics, but Taylor argues that authenticity is 'unrepudiable' for moderns (Taylor, 1994:23), even for theorists like Foucault. The queer ethic does not argue for authenticity as a personal, or natural attribute of the self, yet Halperin's impersonal self nonetheless draws on aspects of 'authenticity' in the sense that it involves self-creation, originality and opposition to the rules of society. According to Taylor, this is a debased form of authenticity because it does not incorporate two other important criteria that prevent authenticity from degenerating into subjectivism and soft relativism. He argues that authenticity, to be an ideal worth living up to, must recognise:

(i)   the horizon of significance (values and hypergoods) that give meaning to self-creation; and

(ii)   the broader dialogical relations in which individuals exist, and through which they develop their authentic sense of self.

The queer emphasis on the importance of the self being 'shattered' and 'decentred' and gaining personal autonomy through techniques of self-transformation, ends up with a model of the self that is narcissistic and isolated. Autonomy is gained, but at the expense of solidarity (Benhabib, 1992:198). As suggested by Benhabib at the end of Chapter Two, a persuasive argument can be made that individuals may benefit from developing a coherent sense of self-identity by developing an integrated life story that has a narrative form. Jeffrey Weeks' (1995:66) discussion of democratic autonomy may be useful in capturing the kind of freedom that exists between authenticity and autonomy. It suggests that sexual freedom can only be realised in conditions of *mutuality* i.e. each individual's ability to seek and obtain the pleasures and emotional satisfactions desired is reliant on the reciprocal recognition of the other. This implies *responsibility to others* as a necessary condition of individual 'freedom'.

From Queer to Lived Experience

The theoretical legacy of Foucault's work is currently worked through debates around queer theory. In both feminist[14] and gay theory a queer paradigm is suggested as a way of working past the inadequacies of modernist theory with its unitary notion of identity. In this chapter I have argued that Halperin's development of queer theory reflects many of the problems associated with Foucault's theory. In addition, Halperin pushes gay theory and politics in a direction that fails to account adequately for the nature of lived sexual identity and the necessity for ethics and politics to include explicitly developed value commitments. The queer refusal of authenticity is not an empowering position from which to pursue gay sexual freedom in an age of risk.

In Chapter One I outlined some difficulties associated with a queer reconceptualisaton of sexual identity as performativity. The queer paradigm leaves an understanding of lived experience of sexuality disconnected from the ontological narrativity through which identities

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14.   See for example Judith Butler (1990, 1993).

are constituted. Weeks is right to point out that 'many people who practise various forms of homosexual activity fail to recognise themselves in labels such as homosexual, lesbian and gay, queer' (Weeks, 1995:42). However, this does not lead to the conclusion that identity is therefore a category that is without theoretical, political and ethical worth. Indeed, the concept of narrative identity is able to overcome some of the problems that have been identified with 'identity' as such. Such a concept also contributes to a model of a 'radical humanism' that is attentive to questions of diversity, choice and the human bond (Weeks, 1995:42).

My discussion of narrative identity to this point has relied on conceptual discussions largely separated from lived experience. In the following three chapters I will develop the concept of narrative identity in relation to the accounts of eight men and women who talked to me at length about their sexual lives; their desires for relationships and pleasures, their perceptions of HIV risk, their experiences of risk, pleasure, vulnerability and love and their hopes for a sexual future. The interviews that I conducted with these individuals contribute to the project of this thesis in exploring how we might conceptualise a meaningful connection between sexual freedom and safe sex.

This claim that safe sex is sexual freedom must take seriously Benhabib's argument that there are two, interconnected levels (systemic and lived) to crisis and critique. In Chapter One I was concerned with critically evaluating the political and ethical commitments of feminist and gay projects of safe sex, while chapters Three and Four sought to explore more general discourses of sexual freedom. However, the idea that safe sex *is* sexual liberation is counter-intuitive and at a surface level the experience of individuals would suggest that there is no connection between safe sex and sexual freedom. Safe sex is almost universally understood in the lives of individuals as a limitation on, rather than liberation of, sexual expression. However it is my contention that an exploration of the lived experience of sexual practice, under the shadow of HIV risk, raises a number of issues to do with sexual autonomy that are at the heart of those broader political attempts to conceptualise safe sex in relation to sexual freedom. In particular it is the concept of narrative identity, that at the levels of both theory and lived experience, can contribute to an understanding of safe sexual freedoms.

CHAPTER FIVE

RISK, SAFE SEX AND THE POWER OF NARRATIVE RESEARCH

> Our lives are ceaselessly intertwined with narrative, with the stories that we tell and
> hear told, with the stories that we dream or imagine or would like to tell. All these
> stories are reworked in that story of our own lives which we narrate to ourselves in
> an episodic, sometimes semiconscious, virtually uninterrupted monologue. We live
> immersed in narrative, recounting and reassessing the meanings of our past actions,
> anticipating the outcomes of our future projects, situating ourselves at the
> intersection of several stories not yet completed. We explain our actions in terms of
> plots, and often no other form of explanation can produce sensible statements
> (Polkinghorne, 1988:160).

In Chapter One I suggested that it was possible to see safe sex as a project of sexual

liberation. This argument was developed in Chapters Two, Three and Four through

exploring various dimensions of debates about how sexual freedom might be understood as

a political and ethical goal. However, if safe sex is to embody sexual freedom in any

meaningful way, it has to make sense of the lived experience of individuals. The safe sex

project has to move off the page and into life and, in so doing, become a project of the *self*.

Such a notion suggests that safe sex must be understood as more than a set of techniques that

have to be learnt, rather it necessarily involves some kind of self-change and social action on

the part of the individual. Making changes in sexual practice and to the sexual self is no

simple matter, given that these incorporate important aspects of gendered erotic identity and

values. Indeed as Annick Prieur (1988:16), argues 'there can lie a good deal of longing and

love in unsafe sex'. The meaning of particular practices is deeply symbolic and expressive

of who we are and want to be. An individual subjective sense of self, of 'who I am', may

well be interwoven with hegemonic and 'unsafe' forms of sexual practice. For example in

her study of disadvantaged heterosexual women, Sobo argues that:

> unsafe sex is part of a psychosocial strategy for maintaining one's status and sense
> of self - a strategy that involves telling patterned *narratives* (as regarding a partner's
> faithfulness) and acting out scripts (as by engaging in unsafe sex) that optimistically
> confirm the quality of one's choice of a partner and so of one's relationship with him

(Sobo, 1995:106 - my emphasis).

This notion of narrativity, long an accepted component of historical research and scholarship, has only more recently come to be accepted as a legitimate, and indeed powerful tool in social science research (Somers, 1994; Somers and Gibson, 1994; Maines, 1993; Plummer, 1995; Polkinghorne, 1988). The turn to narrativity in sociology brings to questions of risky and safe sex practice a concern with the way in which the stories that people tell themselves (about their desires, about what is good sex and bad sex, about what is appropriate for them and so on) help to shape both their perception of risk and the actions that they take in the light of these assessments. An understanding of narrative identities is therefore necessary to explain sexual agency both in relation to HIV risk and broader questions of sexual autonomy. In order to explore this level of analysis in the next three chapters, I now turn to a consideration of the in-depth interviews I conducted with young sexually active men and women about their perception of HIV risk and sexual practice.

It is possible to see my study as a form of what Plummer has called 'personal experience narratives around the intimate' (Plummer, 1995:7). Such personal, sexual narratives are a growing element of late modernity which Plummer argues is obsessed with sex as the Big Story (Plummer, 1995:4). This preoccupation with sexual stories is partially explained for Plummer by the fact that we are '*homo narrans*: humankind the narrators and story tellers' (Plummer, 1995:5). However, the personal narratives that are the subject of analysis in this thesis did not occur 'naturalistically'. They were created in the context of an interview situation in which people who were strangers to me were asked to talk about their sexual experience, views of their own HIV risk and steps they had taken, if any, to avoid HIV infection. The answers to the questions I posed were formed through narrative themes. The identification of these themes and their place in explaining social action around sex is the focus of this and the following two chapters.

Risk and Narrative Identity

Sexual practice is intimately connected with risk. While the sexual risk associated with the human immuno-deficiency virus presents the most serious danger to life, sex has always carried the risks of sexually transmitted disease, of unwanted pregnancy, and the potential

for physical and emotional neglect and abuse. These risks associated with sex are mediated through gendered power relations, and in addition, certain sexual identities carry the risk of discrimination and violence. Risk has also been central to the construction of an understanding of what the AIDS crisis 'is'. As suggested in Chapter One, the notion of AIDS as a plague works on the grounds that there are 'risk groups' who suffer the ravages of sexual disease, because they are tainted through their unhealthy and/or immoral 'lifestyles'. This idea that there are 'AIDS risk groups' (most notably gay men, intravenous drug users and prostitutes) has been replaced in most HIV prevention discourse with the view that it is behaviour, and more particularly specific sexual practices, that place one at risk rather than belonging to an identity category. One reason for this move was an attempt to destigmatise those categories of individuals (such as gay men) who have high levels of HIV infection. Indeed it is accurate at one level to say that risk is associated with specific practices, regardless of the name one gives oneself. However, it is also true to say that the way in which risk is assessed by individuals and the forms of action taken around sex are intimately connected to self-identity. It is the self-understandings of individuals which shape everyday sexual practice and are the subject of my discussion in the following two chapters.

Risk, Trust and Reflexivity

The sexual risks associated with HIV exist in the larger context of late modernity, which has been characterised as a *risk society*[1]. A risk society is one in which bodies constantly have to defend themselves from the external horrors of 'pollutants, toxins and radiation' (Tulloch and Lupton, 1995:2). In addition risk is associated with the reflexivity of modernity and 'the susceptibility of most aspects of social activity, and material relations with nature, to *chronic revision in the light of new information or knowledge*' (Giddens, 1991:20 - my emphasis). Giddens argues that the general context of modern 'risk society' ensures that trust relations are vested in 'abstract systems'. These systems are 'disembedding mechanisms' in that they separate 'interaction from the particularities of locale' (Giddens,

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1.   See Beck (1992), Giddens (1991) and Beck, Giddens and Lash (1994). For Giddens risk is a
        fundamental cultural aspect of modernity, and the awareness of risk forms a medium of colonising the
        future (Giddens, 1991).

1991:20). Abstract systems include both symbolic tokens[2] and, more importantly, in relation to HIV risk, *expert systems* which depend 'on rules of procedure transferable from individual to individual' (Giddens, 1991: 243). In modern societies, then, risk is associated with the 'threats and dangers emanating from the *reflexivity* of modernity' and abstract systems are the means by which social relations are stabilised across time and space. These are distinct from pre-modern risks which were concerned primarily with 'threats and dangers emanating from *nature*, such as the prevalence of infectious diseases'. In such conditions, stabilisation occurs through traditional kin relations and local communities (Giddens, 1991:102).

While HIV risk is certainly a threat associated with 'nature', it exists in the context of modernity's reflexivity. There can be no doubt that knowledge about HIV, AIDS and safe sex have been constituted through the ideas of experts, constantly revised and debated, as they try to come to grips with a previously unknown virus. Individual risk assessment is therefore partly premised on making sense of competing 'expert-mediated knowledges'.[3] This necessarily involves the exercise of a level of trust in which individuals are prepared to place their confidence in bodies of knowledge that they may be ignorant of themselves. This trusting attitude may in fact bring the individual, knowingly or unknowingly, into contact with risk because of the constant revisability of technical systems of knowledge.

> The AIDS epidemic has cast doubt upon medical science's ability to control fatal infectious illnesses. As a result, individuals are living in a state of heightened reflexivity about the health of their bodies (Tulloch and Lupton, 1995:2).

This heightened reflexivity means that very few people place an unquestioning trust in expert systems and 'everyone, whether consciously or not, *selects* among the competing possibilities of action that such systems (or disengagement from them) provide' (Giddens, 1991:22-3 - my emphasis).

While trust in expert systems is essential to engendering day-to-day security, Giddens does not believe that it can provide the kinds of psychological rewards or moral satisfactions that

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2.   These are 'media of exchange that have standard value and are thus interchangeable across an infinite variety of contexts' (Giddens, 1991:244).

3.   These experts include the 'esoteric thought communities' of medical researchers and practioners as well as 'exoteric circles' such as AIDS organisations. See Patton (1990a) and White and Willis (1992) for a discussion of how these different thought-communities interact in creating AIDS knowledge.

can be obtained from trust in other people (Giddens, 1991:185). Certainly the assessment of HIV risk within sexual relations entails a significant investment in personal trust relations alongside trust in expert systems. Such personal trust relations might for example involve trusting the words of another when they say they are HIV negative or that they are monogamous. This form of trust involves confidence in the love and 'probity' of another (Giddens, 1990:34), and involves a process 'of *mutual narrative and emotional disclosure.* An "opening out" to the other is the condition of the development of a stable tie - save where traditional patterns are for one reason or another reimposed, or where emotional dependencies or compulsions exist' (Giddens, 1994:187 - my emphasis). This is clearly significant for individuals in the context of HIV risk, where condoms and safe sex are often abandoned if there is a belief in the trustworthiness of partners' accounts of their sexual history or more generally, it is felt that they are not 'that kind of person'. This reliance on the trustworthiness of others is a routine aspect of sexual relationships. As discussed in Chapter One, it has become organised explicitly for some gay men around a safe sex strategy of 'negotiated safety'.

These two forms of trust (in experts and intimate others) co-exist and frequently conflict with each other. However, Giddens argues that the most significant form of trust is that organised around expert knowledge. In this context self-identity is of necessity a reflexively organised endeavour:

> The reflexive project of the self, which consists in the sustaining of coherent, yet continuously revised, biographical narratives, takes place in the context of multiple choice as *filtered through abstract systems*. [...] Reflexively organised life-planning, which normally presumes consideration of risks as filtered through contact with *expert knowledge*, becomes a central feature of the structuring of self-identity (Giddens, 1991:5 - my emphasis).

I would like to suggest that this is a useful place to start thinking about the process that occurs as individuals either do, or do not negotiate safe sex. Here Giddens is suggesting that individuals assess and negotiate their risk through the mediation of expert knowledge. The process of risk assessment is a fundamental way in which individuals attempt to 'colonise the future' and, as such, it helps to carve out a space for future possibilities. Risk assessment, in the context of HIV risk, involves paying attention to the medical establishment's changing ideas of which sexual practices are most risky in terms of HIV

transmission, and what constitutes safe sexual practice.   This knowledge is further constructed through media representations, and educational campaigns by the state and AIDS organisations. However, I would argue that, in the context of HIV risk assessment, expert knowledge is not as central to self-identity as Giddens maintains.   My research suggests that expert knowledge is mediated by other, pre-exisiting narratives of the sexual self.   It is these narratives that shape individuals' perception of risk and understandings of expert knowledge.   Moreover, personal trust relations are more central to the reflexive project of the self than expert knowledge.[4]

Narrative: Identity, Action and Rationality

> So basic to agency is ontological narrativity that if we want to explain - that is to know, to make sense of, to account for, perhaps even to predict, anything about the practices of social and historical actors [...] - we must first recognise the place of ontological narratives in social life (Somers and Gibson, 1994:61).

Much social science research is premised on the notion that the social categories to which people belong are constitutive of social identity, interests and social action. However, this view is contested from an emerging sociological narrative perspective, in which explanations for social action require exploration of the narrative identities that individuals construct. Such an approach situates action in the context of the narrative identities, that are expressed by individuals.

> social action can only be intelligible if we recognise that people are guided to act by the relationships in which they are embedded and by the stories with which they identify (Somers and Gibson, 1994:62).

The concept of narrative identity replaces that of 'categorical identity' in which individuals are categorised according to social attributes such as class, gender, age, ethnicity or a combination of these. The problem with this conceptualisation of identity is that people do not typically understand themselves in the terms of categories, if these are abstracted from the context of lived experience. Polkinghorne (1988) makes this point when he suggests that social action occurs as we place ourselves *in the context of a life story with episodes*. He

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4.   A related critique of Giddens suggests that people are just as reliant on an 'experiential knowledge' that can be gained from people with AIDS, sexual health counsellors or women's health care workers (Tulloch and Lupton, 1995). This knowledge was seen as being more 'real' and connected with the experience of living whereas expert knowledge (e.g. scientific knowledge about what the virus is, how it is transmitted and so on) was often distrusted.

gives the example of an individual buying life insurance. This does not happen because the individual says 'I am 40 years old; I should buy life insurance' but because 'I felt out of breath last week, I really should start thinking about life insurance' (Polkinghorne, 1988:21).

This approach to social action is suggestive in explaining why and how people engage in risky or safe sex. However, it is perhaps more accurate to say that narrative identity *mediates*, rather than replaces categorical identity. To illustrate this point, take for example a consideration of how a gay man might come to a decision that he should avoid sexual practices that will place him at risk of HIV infection. An approach based on an understanding of personal identity as constructed through categories might argue that such a safe sex decision is reached on the basis of the individual's recognition that he shares the same categorical status, and therefore, interests of other gay men. That is, the reasoning might go something like this; 'because gay men are at risk of HIV, and I am a gay man, therefore I should practice safe sex'. However, for theorists who understand identity in terms of its narrativity, this approach neglects to account for the way in which the risk of HIV infection is mediated through personal narratives around vulnerability, invulnerability, the trustworthiness of sexual partners, desires for sexual pleasure and intimacy, and so on. While HIV is clearly a risk associated with sex between men, and while higher levels of safe sex are associated with those men who see themselves as gay and part of a gay community,[5] an individual assessment of risk and practice of safe sex is complicated by a whole range of other narrative understandings for an individual, of what *kind* of gay man he is, of who his partners are, of what he values in sexual relationships and so on. Clearly then, although the concept of categorical identity does have some analytical validity,[6] it does not exist in the self-understandings of individuals outside of more personal narrative identities.

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5.   See especially Kippax, Crawford, Connell et al (1992) and Kippax, Connell, Dowsett and Crawford (1993).

6.   There have been some very important, large-scale quantitative studies of the relationship between social categories such as class, education level, ethnicity, gay identification and sexual practice. In particular the studies conducted at Macquarie University have provided valuable information about some of the social determinants of safe and unsafe sex (see in particular Kippax, Connell, Dowsett and Crawford,1993). This analytical framework is not supplanted, but supplemented by studies which focus on the level of narrative identity.

A demonstration of the power of 'narrative identity' as an analytical category can be found in the analysis of the life stories of two French women. Marie-Francoise Chanfrault-Duchet (1991) argues that a narrative analysis is vital to understanding the meanings of these women's lives. Both women shared a set of *categorical* identities, yet they each produced very different *narrative accounts* of their lives, and these narrative accounts shaped how they lived and made sense of their place in the world. The women were both from Creuse (a poor region of France), born in the first decade of this century. Their husbands were seasonal migrant workers, and both women shifted from a rural environment into town after the Second World War. Nothwithstanding these common gendered and class positions, each woman produced a very different narrative of her life. Consequently, it can be argued that 'the facts and events [of their lives] take their meaning from the narrative structure in which they are embedded' (Chanfrault-Duchet, 1991:29). An analysis of these life stories only at the level of their content and of the *analogies* between these two women's lives, would have missed the very different meanings that each woman gave to her life experience and their different visions of history and different ways of relating to female identity. The argument here is not that the two women did not have a similar location within structuring social relations, but that *within* those sets of social relations narrative played an important role in defining differences between the two women.[7]

Chanfrault-Duchet's analysis illustrates how the self is constituted as a narrative identity, which 'assumes people act in particular ways because not to do so would fundamentally violate their sense of being at that particular time and place' (Somers and Gibson, 1994:62). An approach to the self focusing on narrative identity, must therefore pay attention to the ontological and public narratives through which people 'plot' their lives and selves. When people talk about their sexual lives, they are involved in producing ontological narratives that help them to make sense of and act in their lives (Somers and Gibson, 1994:61). These ontological narratives are used to define who we are, which in turn is a precondition for knowing what to do. Social action is guided through narrative and should not be viewed as a result of an abstact process of *categorisation*, but seen rather as emerging in the context

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7.   Somers and Gibson (1994:69) make a useful distinction between two kinds of classification. There are those that are based on taxinomical categories (for example age, gender, education) or 'fixed' entities (such as woman, man, black); and those based on 'categories that coincide with a narrative theme'.

of a life-story with episodes. These ontological narratives are social and interpersonal, moreover they draw on 'public narratives' that pre-exist the individual and that provide the broader social context of meaning (Somers and Gibson, 1994:61).

Such a perspective is clearly at odds with those models of health behaviour such as the 'health belief model', 'the theory of reasoned action' and 'social learning theory' in which personal choices about sexual practice are understood on the basis of an individualist model of rationality.[8] The assumption from such perspectives is that individuals make calculations and choices about what is risky and how to avoid risk, on the basis of 'rational decision-making about the probability and severity of potential harm' (Rhodes, 1995:127) Risk avoidance behaviour is valorised as rational behaviour, and choosing unsafe sex from this perspective is simply 'irrational' because it is risky. In contrast to such a view, narrative research is concerned to explain how choices around sexual practice are shaped through a form of reasoning 'that tacks back and forth from the events to the plot' (Polkinghorne, 1988:131). Choices that are made can therefore be seen as forms of narrative action involving a narrative form of rationality.

> Action itself is the living narrative expression of a personal and a social life. The competence to understand a series of episodes as part of our story informs our own decisions to engage in actions that move us towards a desired ending (Polkinghorne, 1988:145).

Narrative forms of rationality may not always provide safe forms of social action, as evidenced by Sobo's study, but they *are* nevertheless rational in the sense that they provide coherent and meaningful ways for individuals to express their values and choices about what matters to them. To simply dismiss narrative rationality and consequent action as 'irrational' and wrong continues to limit an understanding of behaviour change in terms of the provision of accurate knowledge. This model of understanding health-related behaviour is now thoroughly discredited in sociological literature. The identification of narrative themes in the self-understandings of individuals provides a more detailed and nuanced understanding of the processes involved in decision-making around risky and safe sex. However, this should not be read as an argument for accepting the validity of all narrative constructions. Clearly some

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8.   For detailed critiques of the health belief models see Rhodes (1995), Davies, Hickson, Weatherburn and Hunt (1993), Aggleton, O'Reilly, Slutkin and Davies (1994), Watney (1991b).

narrative themes are better than others, because they encourage and enable both safety and sexual autonomy.

Emplotment, Authenticity and Sexual Autonomy

> narratives are contellations of relationships (connected parts) embedded in *time and space*, constituted by *causal emplotment*. [...] Narrativity demands that we discern the meaning of any single event only in temporal and spatial relationship to other events (Somers and Gibson, 1994:59).

The narratives that are constructed at the public and ontological level 'hang together' by virtue of their plot. Plot, therefore, can be likened to the logic or syntax of narrative (Somers and Gibson, 1994:60). This is illustrated in the example given earlier of a man deciding it is time for him to buy life insurance. The process of emplotment provides the interpretive frame for an event (feeling breathless) and for turning this interpretation into an action (buying life insurance). Therefore making an action intelligible is a matter of grasping it as an episode in the history of an individual's life. We therefore:

> come to view it as another instalment in a nesting of narratives. In offering an explanation of what we are doing we relate it to our own intentions and thereby present it under the aspect of a further episode in the narrative of our lives (Somers and Gibson, 1994:65).

The process of emplotment turns discrete events into a meaningful story. The plot that is created, and which distinguishes narrative from other forms of discourse is characteristically thematic in nature (Somers and Gibson, 1994:60). It is this narrative theme that has a primacy in determining how events are perceived and what criteria will be used to prioritise them. Moreover, these themes involve 'evaluative criteria' that help social actors make distinctions and qualifications among the vast range of events and settings in which they find themselves.

In this respect, the notion of narrative identity builds upon Taylors's (1989) notion of the self, in which human agency and selfhood are understood in relation to hypergoods. These hypergoods provide the evaluative criteria through which individuals shape up the events of life into some form of thematic unity. Therefore narrative themes work by :

(i)   selectively appropriating the happenings of the social world;

(ii)   arranging these happenings in some order; and

(iii)   normatively evaluating these arrangements (Somers and Gibson, 1994:60).

Through drawing on these narrative themes, our lives become *enacted* narratives in which we are both characters and authors. We draw on the narratives made available to us in the public sphere, place ourselves in relation to these and construct a sense of our own power and autonomy in the world.   Self-identity, therefore, involves a process of shaping 'the circumstances of my birth and family, linguistic, cultural, and gender identity into a coherent narrative that stands as my life's story...The self is not a thing, a substrate, but *the protagonist of a life's tale'* (Benhabib, 1986:166 - my emphasis). This understanding of self-identity raises once again the question of the relationship between authenticity and autonomy.

To reiterate arguments developed in chapters One and Two, autonomy is related to individuals' abilities to tell their story, not from the perspective of another (the self as victim), nor solely from their own isolated standpoint (the self as narcissist), but in relation to a critical reflexivity about the 'web of narratives' in which human subjectivity unfolds (Benhabib, 1986:198, 333). It is this critical reflexivity that was identified in the feminist WRAP studies as providing individuals with the means by which they might make meaningful changes in their lives. Some narrative constructions of the self are therefore 'better' in the sense that the substance of the narrative themes; the values and 'goods' to which they refer, can be evaluated through criteria external to individual ontology. This returns both the theorist, and sexual actor, to considerations about power and radical humanist values.

Narrative identities, therefore, should be understood as aspects of social ontology. They refer to a level of social being that contributes to explaining why individuals take the actions that they do. However this ontological narrativity is not an argument for the endorsement of all forms of narrative identity as equally valid.   Some identities involve themes of powerlessness or dominance that cannot be defended from a radical humanist perspective. They may not approach the level of democratic autonomy in which individuals express their desires in ways that respect the claims of others, and which demonstrate their awareness of the inequalities that exist between sexual actors.

Narrative Research and Interview Analysis

The discussion to this point has outlined the analytical connections that have been made between identity, action and narrativity. This way of conceptualising the problem of explaining social action has contributed to the development of narrative forms of empirical research. My research into personal sexual narratives around HIV risk and safe sex has been shaped through the work of Polkinghorne (1988) and Mischler (1986a, 1986b). In this section, I briefly outline aspects of narrative research that are useful in exploring the questions that motivate my study.

Polkinghorne argues that there are two forms of narrative research - descriptive and explanatory. The former is concerned with describing the *narrative accounts* that individuals use to interpret the events of their lives and to make them meaningful (Polkinghorne, 1988:161-70), while the latter seeks to provide a narrative *explanation* for why some form of human action has occured (Polkinghorne, 1988:170-177). In my study, I have viewed these as two important and interrelated components of analysis. The descriptive level that Polkinghorne refers to is necessary for describing the narrative forms that individuals use to make sense of their own HIV risk, the meaning of sex in their lives and the forms of risky and safe sexual practice that they adopt. This descriptive level contributes to explanation when it recreates the narrative that has led to the 'story's end' and can draw from it 'the significant factors that have "caused" the final event' (Polkinghorne, 1988:171). While there is no final 'end' to the interview transcripts that form the data base of my research (given that sexual life is ongoing) it is still possible to offer an explanation for why individual sexual practice took the form it did, at the time of the interview, in terms of the narratives that are employed by individuals and that guide their social action. That narrative can be understood as an *explanatory* rather than merely *representative* or *descriptive* level of analysis does not require the abandonment of 'external truth criteria' if by that we mean a search for the 'best account', and 'epistemic gain' rather than 'absolute truth' (see Somers and Gibson, 1994:84).[9] This approach also allows some commentary on what such a narrative suggests about personal sexual autonomy. For example where individuals demonstrate not just

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9.   For a stronger and more detailed justification for the explanatory nature of narrative research see Somers (1994), Polkinghorne (1988), Abbott (1990).

knowledge about HIV and safe sex but a critical consciousness of how this relates to them and how they are placed in terms of power relations, *and* where they are able to communicate this to their sexual partners (and where the individual is able to tell their story not only from their own perspective but also recognising others) then it can be said that they embody a level of sexual autonomy that may encourage both safety as well as desired forms of sexual pleasure and intimacy.

Polkinghorne argues that narrative researchers work on the assumption that people strive to organise their experience into meaningful wholes, and that they use the narrative form to unite otherwise discrete events into thematic unities (Polkinghorne, 1988:163). On this basis we might understand interview research, especially when it involves semi- or unstructured interviews, as providing storied responses that form a pool of data to be analysed. In addition to these stories, other less coherent elements of the interview transcript still typically incorporate elements of narrativity. The role of the researcher is to 'move from the specific stories a person uses to account for particular episodes to more general life stories that provide self-identity and give unity to the person's whole existence' (Polkinghorne, 1988:163). The purpose of the analysis is to abstract the plot from the total response of the interviewee. This requires a process in which interviews are broken down and particular statements identified according to the role they play in the narrative account (Polkinghorne, 1988:164).

According to Mischler, this process of 'determining *the* point of a story' is the investigative problem facing those undertaking narrative research (Mischler, 1986a:236). In their interviews, respondents do not explicitly point out the plot or thematic unity of their stories. It is therefore up to the researcher to identify the 'core narrative' that lies at the heart of individual self-identity. This is achieved through a close and careful reading of the interview transcripts, 'interpretation depends on a reading and assessment of the full response from which the core narrative was extracted' (Mischler, 1986a:238). The identification of a core narrative is considered 'valid' when it can be shown that a number of accounts or episodes are able to be related to the general story. This kind of validity is concerned with assessing whether the core narrative, reconstructed by the researcher, can account for a variety of

stories and explanations given by the respondents. The unity of a core narrative is therefore characterised by what Agar and Hobbs (1982:7) call 'themal coherence'.

HIV Risk Assessment and Safe Sex in the Lives of Sexually Active Young Adults

Considerations of HIV risk assessment and safe sex enter the lives of individuals at particular moments in time; not just moments in social and political history, but also at particular moments in a sexual and personal history. This personal history, with its already constructed narrative themes, precedes and shapes the individual assessment of HIV risk and negotiations around safe sex. However, the risks associated with sexual disease have also come to exert their own structuring effect on sexual practice and self-identity. In this sense, then, safe sex might be conceptualised as an aspect of the reflexive project of the self (Giddens, 1991:5). A personal safe sex project is not a matter of knowledge gained once and for all. There are sexual relationships, fateful moments, and routine sexual life that contribute to its development and shape. Such a project is also more meaningful for gay men than for others. However, for all sexually active individuals, considerations of risk and trust are central to the construction of individual core sexual narratives. In this section, I will briefly outline the empirical research and analytical approach that forms the basis of the following two chapters. More detailed discussion of aspects of the research method are discussed in the Methodological Appendix.

In order to explore the nature of individual assessment of HIV risk and the practice of risky or safe sex, I have analysed in depth eight case studies chosen from a pool of twenty-four sexually active men and women in their twenties.[10] I chose to interview people in their twenties because they are at a stage in their life where they have passed through the uncertainties surrounding first sexual relationships - they are no longer adolescents - but neither have they 'settled down'(although most of them expressed a desire to do that), and they are at a period of their life when they are most likely to have a number of different sexual partners. As Wight suggests, 'life stage-appropriate behaviour is probably particularly important in the area of sexuality where many people have a concept of a conventional sexual

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10.   See the Methodological Appendix for a justification of the case study method and a discussion of how
        these case studies were chosen from a larger pool of interviews conducted as part of this research.

career in which having several partners precedes settling down' (Wight, 1994:107). While this is less the case for gay men whose sexual culture is not so dominated by a norm of coupled monogamy, the men I interviewed did express strong desires to 'settle down'.

The case studies that I developed allowed me to explore in detail the influence of narrative identity on HIV risk perception, sexual practice and to relate this to considerations of sexual autonomy. The data for this part of the thesis consisted of transcripts from the semi-structured interviews that I conducted with four gay men[11] and four heterosexually-active women. I interviewed each of these individuals at least twice, and in the case of Vern, Kate and Odette, three times. They therefore lie somewhere between in-depth interviews and more extensive life histories.

The interviews covered the following areas:[12]
•   personal and family background
•   sexual history
•   sexual identity
•   sexual desire
•   HIV risk perception
•   sexual practice

The interview schedule was used as a guide to getting individuals started on talking about their sexual lives but it was not used rigidly and I encouraged the respondents to elaborate on those aspects of their sexual lives that seemed to be of particular interest to them. By so doing they developed the kind of narrative accounts that formed the basis of my analysis.

My aim in analysing the interview transcripts was to explain how and why the individual's practice of risky and safe sex took the form that it did. In order to accomplish this, I first

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11.   I use 'gay' as shorthand here. One of the men, Vern, actually thought of himself as bisexual, but at the time of interviewing he was homosexually active, and had been for the previous six years. There was also very little discussion in Vern's interviews about relationships with women, except at an idealised level of what he would like for himself in the future.

12.   See 'Interview Schedule' in the Methodological Appendix for a copy of the schedule that formed the basis of each initial interview.

sought to describe the forms of personal sexual narrative that were at the heart of each individual's view of him or herself as a sexual person. These narratives exist alongside a process of individual HIV risk assessment in which other narratives around health, trust in science and so on, help construct the individual's view of their own risk of HIV infection. There is a dynamic relationship between these narratives of sexual self and perceived risk. For example, for some individuals, HIV risk is understood through an already constructed view of sexual self, while for others the perception of HIV risk plays a larger part in the actual constitution of sexual narratives of self. These core sexual narratives and patterns of HIV risk assessment were used to explain actual sexual practice. This form of analysis has the advantage of addressing the fact that even where individuals share categorical identities, educational level and so on, there are often profoundly different responses to HIV risk. This approach does not rule out the importance of other analytical levels that might be appropriate when looking *across* groups of individuals. However, I believe narrative analysis provides a powerful way for understanding how sexual practice is constituted at the level of individual practice.

In previous chapters I have argued that the dialectics of pleasure and of intimacy exist in tension within competing political and theoretical formulations of sexual freedom. This tension also contributes to the constitution of individual sexual self-identity. My argument is that the particular balance that is struck in an individual's life between pleasure (with concerns around gratification and the body) and intimacy (involving issues of trust and communication) constitutes the core sexual narrative that shapes how we come to make sense of our own sexual lives, of what we value and of who we want to become.

The process of identifying these core sexual narratives out of the thousands of words generated in the interviews was 'messy'. I began by grouping each respondent's statements around ideas about personal HIV risk, sexual practice and value statements about the kind of sexual life that was desired (paying attention to how pleasure and intimacy were articulated in relation to each other). I was guided by Somers and Gibson's discussion of the three elements of narrative themes described earlier. The identification of the core sexual narratives involved a process of reading and re-reading the interviews to see if what seemed

to be an emerging theme could be used to make sense of various accounts of sexual experience within the transcripts. To suggest that there is a 'core' sexual narrative does not entail ignoring the competing and sometime contradictory themes within individuals accounts. However, where competing themes exist, it is still possible to identify a thematic element that provides a degree of coherence to what might otherwise seem like disparate and disconnected aspects of the self.

In the next two chapters, the following format is used to explore issues of narrative identity for homosexually-active men and heterosexually-active women. Each chapter begins with an introduction that provides a brief overview of central thematic issues that have been identified through empirical studies of sexual practice in relation to HIV risk. I then take each of the selected case studies and provide an analysis around the following:

- an overview of the individual's personal and sexual history;
- a description of their core sexual narrative;
- a discussion of the ways in which HIV and other risks are assessed; and
- a summary of the way the core sexual narrative and HIV risk assessment that have been identified explains the individual pattern of risky and safe sex.

I conclude each chapter by discussing how an understanding of the sexual self in terms of narrativity, contributes to a reassessment of elements of broader political and ethical debates around safe sex and sexual freedom.

CHAPTER SIX

RISK AND FREEDOM IN GAY SEXUAL RELATIONSHIPS

Risky and Safe Gay Sex: Questions of Identity and Strategy

Why do gay men have unsafe sex? What explains the different strategies employed by gay men in reducing HIV risk in their sexual practice? How can safe sex be sustained over the sexual lifetime of an individual? These questions exercise the minds of gay activists, HIV prevention educators and social scientists, and they have motivated a huge number of empirical studies seeking to identify the behavioural and social factors that explain such behaviour.[1] I am interested in these questions insofar as they are related to my broader concern with the ways in which safe sex can be conceptualised as a sphere of sexual freedom. Central to questions of gay sexual freedom and safe sex is the nature of gay sexual identity, since many of the men who are at risk from HIV infection in male-to-male sex do not perceive themselves as gay, or they have a model of gay identity that is at some remove from the hegemonic urban gay identity that has become familiar in Western societies. And even for those men who do fit into a recognisable identity category of gay, there are crosscutting identifications, pressures and desires which complicate any unified notion of gay identity. Sitting alongside this focus educational campaigns, while often concerned to 'target' particular sub-groups of gay men, have relied on the idea that there is only one appropriate safe sex strategy, that is that anal intercourse should always be protected with condoms. This chapter is concerned with exploring how analysis of the case studies of four gay men can help clarify issues of sexual identification and safe sex strategy in gay sexual practice.

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1.   From a sociological and critical perspective the best of these studies are the studies from Macquarie University under the Social Aspects of the Prevention of AIDS (see in particular Kippax, Connell, Dowsett and Crawford, 1993), the British study, Project SIGMA (see in particular Davies, Hickson, Weatherburn and Hunt, 1993). Both of these studies involve extensive, multi-faceted approaches to exploring the nature and determinants of safe and unsafe sex among gay men.

The sexual practice of gay men can best be conceptualised as:

> not merely ... an inventory of practices, but as a multifaceted social and cultural product, the logic of which lies in the interactive potential for endlessly re-living intimate pleasures within changing patterns of relations (Dowsett, 1993:S258).

This way of understanding sex draws attention to two, interconnected, aspects of sexual practice. Sexual practice involves both bodily performance (or what elsewhere might be referred to as sexual acts, for example anal intercourse, oral sex, fisting and so on) and the social relationships in which such performance is embedded (with one or more casual and/or regular partners). These two elements of sexual practice (performance and relationship) can be separated analytically but they are experienced in a life as interrelated parts of a whole. It is this whole that is captured through the notion of a core sexual narrative. Sexual narratives are also concerned with articulating the individual's relation to sex through a balance between pleasure and intimacy. This balance may shift over time, and it may also vary in relation to different types of relationship or bodily performance.

The sexual act that has been at the centre of most research about HIV risk in gay sex is anal intercourse. It is the riskiest form of sexual practice in terms of its ability to transmit HIV, particularly from an insertive to a receptive partner. Anal intercourse not only occupies this place as the riskiest form of gay sex, but it is also symbolically central to the meaning of gay sex and identity. The experience of anal intercourse in the lives of gay men demonstrates Connell's notion of bodily performances as at once social and somatic. In a much quoted study Annick Prieur (1990) makes the point that anal intercourse may be a sign of love and commitment between men, and even in the context of HIV risk cannot be dismissed as a perverse and irrational practice. Moreover safe sex 'is often experienced as emotionally colder, as expressions of distrust, and as a reminder of death. To receive semen is traditionally valued as a commitment to the partner' (Prieur, 1990:109). However a recognition of the cultural importance of anal sex in the lives of gay men should not be taken to indicate that all gay men either practise or enjoy anal sex. The interactionist perspective of the SIGMA study draws attention to meaning production and suggests that we need to also be aware that sexual practice at the level of bodily performance has many and varied meanings. The same practice (e.g. anal intercourse) may have different meanings for different individuals and an individual might accord it different meanings at different times in their life.

Moreover this bodily performance of sex occurs in the context of a *relationship* with one or more men. For gay men a meaningful distinction can be made between regular, or primary relationships and casual relationships (see for example Connell, 1993; Davies, Hickson, Weatherburn and Hunt, 1993:174-171). Furthermore, it is possible to differentiate regular partnerships in terms of their 'open' or 'monogamous' nature (Davies, Hickson, et al, ibid).

This chapter develops a two-layered argument. Firstly, I am concerned to illustrate the ways in which core sexual narratives constructed by the four men I discuss here shape their perception of risk and practice of risky and safe sex. Secondly, I return to the discussion raised in Chapter One about the nature of identity and about negotiated safety.

Vern

Personal and Sexual History

Vern is a twenty-six year old bisexual man. He became sexually active around the age of thirteen with boys of his own age however he did not 'lose his virginity with women' until he was sixteen when he had sex with a woman in her forties. Vern 'got the clap' from this occasion which was seen by him and his friends as a sign of sexual sophistication. Vern has felt that he was bisexual from an early age although all his relationships over the last six years have been with men. As a teenager, Vern's relationships with women were publically acknowledged, but at the same time he was also 'sleeping with guys'. Vern found that the girls he went out with wanted more from him than he was prepared to give. He disliked their 'clinginess' and so he would tell them he was gay, as a means of extricating himself from these relationships. Vern's early relationships with boys involved mutual masturbation and he did not start having 'raunchy sex', by which he meant anal sex, until he was nineteen or twenty. He then made a conscious decision to move into a gay lifestyle and took up with an older man who he referred to as his 'sugar daddy'. Around this time Vern worked 'on the game' as a gay escort to finance his drug habits. Vern's career as an escort lasted less than six months and he found the lifestyle somewhat distasteful.

Vern has had many sexual relationships with men, both casual and of a more regular nature. However he has never fallen in love and sometimes wonders if he is capable of this. He says

that he thinks he is more likely to fall in love with a woman than a man, but this possibility carries the attendant danger that he would eventually tire of sex with a female partner and not be able to 'control' his desires for younger men. Vern prefers his boyfriends to be between the ages of fifteen and twenty-one and finds the idea of sex with men older than him distasteful. He explains his relationship with the forty year old sugar daddy as a way of learning about the gay lifestyle and 'how to handle yourself in public, you know being proud whatever you are'.

Vern does not like to feel tied down by his relationships. In the following quote he reflects on a relationship he had at twenty-one with a younger man who wanted fidelity while Vern was 'playing around a bit'.

V: *He didn't particularily like it. I mean it was like most women today, you know if you play around on women they don't like it. I personally say, "Look, you know, there are a lot of people out there that I would like to sleep with, and therefore why should I be tied down to one relationship". Plus I think that the sexual urge tended to work for me on the basis that a one-off was great, it was what I wanted. The orgasm was better because it was new. I become very bored with it [being monogamous] so I've looked for new pastures.*

While Vern clearly enjoys the free and sexually active lifestyle he has crafted for himself, he also wants to have children and settle down with a woman. At the time of the first interview Vern had a younger boyfriend, Neil, who was very much in love with Vern. However by the second interview Neil had left Vern because he was dissatisfied with Vern's lack of commitment. Vern had then decided that he would like to get out of the gay scene and look for a female partner partly because that would be more convenient at work, and partly because he had become tired of the gay scene and wanted to get back into a heterosexual context, 'which after all, it is a nice fuck'. Although this is a desired goal, Vern is aware that he might find the commitment and fidelity expected in a heterosexual context stifling, and so he would like to have a boyfriend at the same time.

Vern has sought sexual and drug-related pleasures equally seriously. As suggested above Vern's sexual life has been active and varied, including one-night stands that he finds exciting and dangerous. Vern enjoys different sexual activities, in both active and passive mode, and relates this to his sexual persona which he believes is less accurately described in terms of a

sexual identity than as being 'morally corrupt'.

> *V:*   *I have some very fundamental ideas which I believe are fundamental human rights. [...] My mum gave me individualist ideas and I've always kept that. I believe very strongly that your home is your castle. You know that the police should not be able to come in regardless. And all those sort of things which are probably classified as being your liberal ideas. But I believe them very strongly and I think they're fundamental rights that people should be able to have their own privacy, should be able to do whatever they want to do in their own homes as long as it doesn't physically or even mentally harm anyone. And therefore smoking or drugs or sleeping with whoever you want to is part and parcel of that.*

In relation to presenting a risk to others Vern is in the unusual situation of having a medical condition, retrograde ejaculation, in which he ejaculates into his bladder. Because he does not produce semen, Vern believes that he is not much of a risk to other people, although he is aware that if there were lesions on his penis involving blood that some risk might be present for a partner. For himself, Vern has courted risk through receptive anal sex which he finds very pleasurable. Vern says that he has minimised anal sex, or used condoms, in recognition of the risk of HIV. However, in his relationship with Neil, who had been a virgin before meeting Vern, receptive anal intercourse had once again become an important part of Vern's sexual activity.

Drug use has also been an important part of Vern's life. He has tried most drugs (narcotics, LSD, mushrooms, barbiturates, marijuana) and while a heavy user in the past Vern now restricts himself to marijuana which he smokes most days. Vern thinks that he is probably addicted to dope but says that he can afford it and that it is a good way to relax from a stressful job. Vern's narcotic use involved some needle-sharing but he believes that risk was minimised by boiling the needles.

Core Sexual Narrative: A Sexual Libertine Having Fun and Minimising Harm

I don't really have a moral structure, I don't consider anything really to be wrong. If it's hurting someone else, then I consider it to be wrong. You know it's like the philosophy of Mill, I think. He just says that you should be able to do anything you want as long as it doesn't harm anybody else. I define harm meaning that, sure it might harm my mother if I get a mohawk, but it doesn't really harm her. You know, I mean it harms her if I mentally berate her. You know so it's really quite a thin line there where you say what harms. So with that moral code, which is really not a moral code, I find that anything can fit in. I mean nothing to me is kinky. I mean it's just life.

Freedom is an important theme in Vern's discussion of his sexual life and how he sees himself. Central to Vern's view of himself, is a notion of being 'atypical', neither a typical gay nor a typical heterosexual. While he resists having to label himself, Vern will call himself gay sometimes, because that is a term that people understand, however he prefers to see himself as being 'morally corrupt'.

> *V:*   *I don't sound camp, I'm not interested in camp things. I don't dress up, you know I just wear jeans and t-shirts. I'm a pretty all-round guy. You know the closest thing to it would possibly be the fact that I can't stand rugby and beer and racing, and that sort of average kiwi-bloke sort of thing. You know as far as I'm concerned I don't look at myself as gay anyway. I look at myself as morally corrupt [laughs].*

Vern's beliefs in freedom are well developed, but he is reluctant to call them 'moral' because of the conservative connotations of this word. Nonetheless Vern's beliefs act to structure his view of the world and his actions within it. At the base of Vern's moral structure are two questions that he asks of the things he does: does it feel good and does it inflict no harm?

> *V:*   *Because of my moral structure I like to look at things and say well "do I feel comfortable doing this?". I don't look at it like "is it morally right?". I look to myself and say would I feel comfortable doing it. And if the answer is yes then I do it. So to have to label yourself as a Christian or whatever, then you cannot accept any other ideas bar those. If you labelled yourself gay then you can never be anything but gay. So that's why I've always tended to make sure that I don't sort of say "this is what I am".*

While Vern clearly articulated this libertarian philosophy he was also at pains to indicate that he believed there were responsibilities attendant on the rights he believed in. However as the following extract indicates, Vern had a very limited understanding of what these responsibilities might entail.

> *V:*   *Well there are also responsibilities. If you want the pleasures of this society then you've got to live up to the responsibilities. It's as simple as that. You know if you want to play within a certain set of rules, if you want the benefits out of a certain society or a certain group, then you've got to play by their rules to a certain extent. So therefore I do. I play the game. I mean I jaywalk, which is not playing the rules, I'll smoke marijuana which is not playing the rules, but I make those decisions on the basis of: a) am I going to get caught? and b) is it going to harm anybody?*

Vern has an ambivalent attitude towards love. He doubts that he is capable of love and resists using that word of any of his relationships, however he also admitted to having sex with Neil, not only for 'for enjoyment, for the orgasm' and because he feels 'horny', but also

because of love and wanting to be close to Neil.

V: *Love's a funny word. You know I prefer to put it down to other words like care. I mean, do you care for this person? Would you allow this person to be hurt? Would you hurt this person? I look at it that way. Not so much as love, because I don't really believe that a lot of people know what they're talking about. And I certainly don't know what I'm talking about when it comes to that.*

While Vern is uncertain that he has ever fallen in love, he did talk of a time when he was still at school and infatuated with another boy. This was experienced as profoundly disturbing and was clearly a time that Vern felt vulnerable. This stood out from the rest of his transcripts, because it was unusual for Vern to admit to any feelings of vulnerability or not being in control of the situation. Typically, Vern positioned himself as someone who was the dominant partner in his sexual relationships. He chooses his partner, determines the shape of relationships and is usually more emotionally distant than his partners. 'They always love me and I don't love them'.

Although Vern is articulate and seemingly self-assured about his sexual desires and search for pleasure, he also feels that his sexual desires run his life and that they are ultimately a distraction from other aspects of his life.   He has often thought about the idea of being chemically castrated so that he would not have to be bothered by sexual desires that were at times demanding and unruly. He sees sex as purely an urge that keeps him from having good friendships because he becomes distracted by wanting to 'take cute men to bed'. In this way he admits that he is a bit of 'a flirt and a sleaze'. He also sees himself as something of a 'Don Juan', particularly in relation to his desire to get rid of his personal history. Vern makes it a regular practice every six months or so to burn his letters and anything personal that might allow anybody to 'get a handle' on him.

Risk Assessment: The Powers of Science and Unruly Desires

For me spreading it [HIV] is not a problem because of my physical ability. You know it's not so much of a risk with me.   Ah, I certainly don't want to have to think about getting another AIDS test. And I'll only have to get another AIDS test if I play round, and I haven't. But in the sense of having unsafe sex that's your responsibility to yourself not to. I mean it's like putting a loaded gun next to your head and rambling around playing Russian roulette. Yet the passion of the moment can still win and that is the frightening thing. It's like a drug addiction, you're never really cured. It can happen tonight, it could happen tomorrow, it could happen three years

from now. I think eventually they will get cures for it, and that's what I'm waiting for.

Vern's approach to the management of his risk of HIV infection is based around a belief in the powers of science to provide accurate tests and to eventually develop both a vaccine and cure. This faith in the saving power of science is used by Vern as a counter-balance to his belief in the instability of his decisions to be responsible, because of the power of his body with its unruly desires to upset rationally-made decisions.

Vern has great faith that medicine and science will produce knowledge that will minimise the risk of HIV. He gets most of his information about what is risky and safe from his step-father who is a medical doctor, but he has seen very little gay-produced material. He places his faith in science as providing the kind of knowledge that he needs to keep himself safe. This faith in science is combined with his libertarian beliefs about the importance of freedom. He strongly believes that there will be a cure for AIDS soon and that this will abate the need for safe sex. In fact it will allow a return to more promiscuous times.

V: *I know that they keep saying that there's not going to be a vaccine for at least ten years, maybe twenty. And perhaps there's not going to be a vaccine which is publically approved. But because there is so much money to be made from the vaccine, well money talks. The things that they've already done that would normally take a hundred years, they've done in five years because now there's money in it. Now that there's lots of money being put into it, you know you've got some of the biggest corporations in the world looking into it, knowing that if they get the vaccine they are made. And that's great and that is what is so wonderful about free economics. It's the fact that there is money to be made from something like that, so people will invest in it. Like condoms. People invest in condoms now because of the same thing. So I have no doubt that within my lifetime, it will be solved.*

This faith in the powers of scientific knowledge is juxtaposed with times when Vern has felt very worried about the fact that he might have been infected with HIV.

V: *I went through a period when I knew that there were people, not that I was sleeping with, there were people in the fringe of that who were AIDS positive and I was still sleeping around then. And I went through some very sweaty nights before AIDS tests, very sweaty nights. Very heavy, heavy, heavy, heavy. You know, it really is a really heavy subject.*

Vern's response to this worry was to have regular HIV tests. At the time of interviewing Vern had had three tests and thought that he would continue to have them every six to twelve

months. He was initially tested because he was worried about his unsafe sexual practice before he started to take AIDS seriously. In more recent years he has practiced safe sex for the most part, but he acknowledges that there are possibilities of 'slip ups'. He uses these tests as a way of reassuring himself that he has not been infected.

V: *But it's in between the times that maybe I have slipped up and so what I'd like to do is give it a good year before, and know that in that year I've done nothing wrong, or nothing unsafe, and then have one. Or maybe have another couple. I go for a health checkup once a year, I get completely everything done, so I'd get it done again then, and I'll probably continue to get it done.*

Vern's reliance on testing and faith in medicine has also developed as a consequence of having had rheumatic fever which was detected before it became a serious threat to his health. He now has regular medical checkups, but makes sure that he never goes to the same doctor so that no one has complete knowledge about him.

Limits of the Libertarian Project and Scientific Knowledge

Vern's medical condition means that it would be difficult for him to pass on HIV if he were infected. His own management of risk is organised around faith in scientific knowledge and medical progress. Vern uses a regime of regular testing to give him knowledge about his HIV status. These tests are taken every six to twelve months in a belief that there might have been times when he slipped up and exposed himself to the transmission of HIV. This regime is clearly shaped by Vern's core sexual narrative of a libertarian ethos in which pleasure and good times are important and should face minimal interference from external forces. Vern believes that his sexual practice should be able to continue very much as in the past. However, this is not a particularly safe regime and Vern reflects on the fact that he has had 'two doses of the clap' in recent times. This scared him because it meant that the precautions he had been taking had not been entirely successful.

V: *Well I've had two doses of the clap. And I thought to myself, "Shit". You know a year ago, getting the clap, is not a good thing. Because that means you've been exposed to something risky.*

In response to thinking about these slips-ups Vern says that he would use condoms if he was not with Neil, or avoid anal sex with a new partner, at least until they had been tested for HIV. However, because Vern tends to put his faith in a future vaccine and cure, his knowledge of some importants aspects of safe sex is deficient. He has had little experience

with condoms and uses moisturiser as a lubricant, unaware that this might weaken the condom.

Vern's reliance on a regime of testing is linked to a belief that there is little risk from sex with women and that many of his boyfriends have been virgins before he had sex with them. Moreover he characterises most of his regular partners as being in love with him and usually faithful to him, therefore he believes he is at little risk of HIV infection from them.

Vern embraces a particular version of sexual freedom, and while it is one that benefits him at the level of immediate sexual gratification, it is not particularly safe nor is it based on respect for his partners. Communication and mutuality are not features of Vern's sexual practice. Vern seems to have little concern for his partner's desires except insofar as they benefit him. For example he explained abiding by Neil's desires for monogamy, on the grounds that his desire for a relationship with Neil was stronger than his desires for other men.

Chris

Personal and Sexual History

Chris is a twenty-four year old librarian. His first sexual relationship, around the age of fourteen at a boy's boarding school, continued for an eighteen month period but was barely spoken about between the two boys. Chris describes boarding school as the worst days of his life. He was not interested in sport (in a school that took seriously the importance of rugby in school life) and instead enjoyed reading. When he and his friend were found out by older boys they were bullied, and Chris eventually left the school to attend a day school closer to the farm where his parents lived.

After leaving boarding school Chris did not have sex again until he was seduced, at nineteen, by a female university friend. Chris described this experience as enjoyable, but it did not feel 'quite right'. However, Chris thought that if the encounter had been with a man it would have been 'perfect'. This encounter did not lead to any further sexual relationships with women and around this time Chris started 'sneaking gay magazines into the flat' and

checking out the gay social scene. Eventually Chris made contact with the gay community through a gay coffee bar and shortly after met his first boyfriend at a gay dance. The rest of that year (his last at university) was spent skiing, spending money and having a good time. Chris then moved into a flat with other gay men and found work in a public library with another gay man who was involved in the homosexual law reform campaign of 1985. Chris was peripherally involved in this campaign and at that time wore a pink triangle to work. Now he does not want his gayness to be the first thing that people find out about him. Chris characterises himself as something of a 'straight gay' in that he differentiates himself from gay men who 'are limp-wristed and mince down the street'. Chris wants to see himself as acting 'naturally' and does not care if people assume that he is straight.

At the time of interviewing Chris had not had a sexual relationship for about six months. He characterises his sexual relationships as a series of short-term sexual liaisons in which he often seems to fall for men who live outside of Wellington and who are in other ways unavailable to him. None of Chris's last five or six relationships have been of more than four month's duration and because the men lived outside of Wellington Chris had sex with them 'a couple of times at the most'. Alongside these relationships, Chris has also used the saunas in the past for casual sexual encounters. Chris does not like this pattern and would much prefer to meet a man with whom he could have an emotionally significant relationship.

Chris became sexually active at a time perceived by him to be 'pre-AIDS'. He therefore felt that he did not have to change much of his sexual practice once he became aware of HIV risk.

C: *Well, for a while I thought to myself I don't need to do that myself, but other people should do it on me. [laughs] It was a long, long time before I actually had anal intercourse with anybody, and that for a long time wasn't one of the things that I did anyway. And it was exciting the first time that I did it. But even since then it's never been something that has happened a lot anyway, so I didn't really have to change much.*

Although Chris says that he has not had to change his sexual practice because anal sex does not figure much in his sexual repertoire there have been quite profound changes made in both

his sexual practice and views about sexual relationships. One 'fateful moment'[2], in particular, has been profoundly disturbing for Chris and accounts for much of his current views on, and practice of, safe sex. This moment was the discovery that a man with whom he had unsafe sex, and who had assured him that he was HIV negative, was actually HIV positive (and knew it) at the time of their affair. This knowledge about sexual encounters with Alex that he had thought at the time were safe but later were discovered to be potentially risky acts as a marker for him - there was 'before' and 'after' this experience. Before this experience with Alex there were times when Chris had unsafe sex but now, afterwards he is adamant that he would never put himself at risk again or put others at risk.

Core Sexual Narrative: Recovering from Betrayal and Longing For Intimacy

I liked him [Alex] a lot and he told me that he had had a test and was safe. So everything just flew out the door then really. But it wouldn't happen now, I'm positive of that. People could say what they like now. I could see that it could happen, but it won't happen again with me.

Chris's view of himself is of somebody who has not had the opportunity to have the kind of sexual relationships that he wants. He sees his tendency to fall for people who do not live in Wellington as something that he has to suffer and he thinks it is unlikely he will meet anyone who is available to him. He longs for an emotionally satisfying sexual relationship and this longing exists alongside Chris's experience of having his trust betrayed by Alex. This experience has placed a deep pall over Chris's faith in both the trustworthiness of others and that he will be able to have the kinds of sexual relationships that he desires.

At the time of the interview Chris was reevaluating what sex and relationships meant to him. He had decided that going to a sauna or having a one-night-stand were no longer options for him.

C: *At one stage I was going to the sauna quite a bit and I don't do that now at all. I don't know when I last went to the sauna. Well I like doing it one way I guess, and the idea of going to the sauna is sort of appealing but on the other hand I find it*

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2.   Giddens defined fateful moments as those 'transition points which have major implications not just for the circumstances of an individual's future conduct, but for self-identity. For consequential decisions, once taken, will reshape the reflexive project of identity through the lifestyle consequences which ensue' (Giddens, 1991:143).

really sort of dirty and it doesn't do your self-esteem any good I don't think.
Chris wants to make his sexual future a safe one. At the time of interviewing he had felt a
bit battered by his experience with Alex and was putting off finding a partner until sometime
in the future.

C: *I don't want to see anybody at the moment. I'm just quite happy to wait things out*
        at the moment and because I'm going overseas soon too, it'd be silly to get into any
        sort of relationship. I sort of think that a one-night-stand, well I can't go out with
        somebody and say to them that this can only be a one-night-stand because I'm going
        away soon. It's unfair on everybody and I just don't want to do that. I just don't feel
        like having anybody at the moment.

Risk Assessment: Expert and Bodily Knowledge

Now I would definitely have safe sex with everybody, everybody. No matter what
they said to me. If I knew their whole sexual history and knew that they didn't have
it, I would still do it because I've been frightened a bit, had a scare. And I would do
safe sex with other people, I definitely would, because I might, even though I'm
99.9% sure that I haven't got it, I wouldn't want to pass it on to anybody else.

Chris has a good knowledge about the vectors of transmitting HIV and the best means for
keeping safe. He has gained much of this knowledge from working with Pat, an older and
politically active gay man. He sees this knowledge as protecting himself from feeling scared
or uncertain about the risk of HIV. However, this knowledge is articulated with another kind
of knowledge that he gets from his body. Chris believes that he would know if he had sero-
converted, because his body would tell him.

When Chris was first sexually active as an adult man he did not think that AIDS was really
an issue for him. Even though he was homosexually active in 1984, and he recalls that he
knew about the risk HIV posed for gay male sex, he did not think that it was really an issue
for him. In the relationship with his first boyfriend (Dennis) Chris had unprotected anal sex
in which he was fucked 'quite hard'. At the end of that relationship, in which the two
remained friends, Dennis had told Chris that 'you won't be able to do that anymore'. Chris
recognised that gay men in New Zealand were now open to the same risk that had previously
only been associated with men from the United States.

While Chris knew in a vague way about AIDS during this first relationship, he did not make
a connection to risk for himself until the following year when he started work in a library.

Over the next few years Chris gained a lot of knowledge about the risks associated with HIV and about how to have safe sex. On the basis of this knowledge Chris says that he is not really scared about AIDS because he knows so much about it.

C: *It wasn't really until I started working at the library with Pat, who has read up everything on it, that I actually started reading a lot more about it, finding out more about the disease itself, being more aware of it. And because of that, when newspapers or the general public started picking up on it, I was left a lot less scared of it, because I knew more about it. And even with everything that happened with Alex, I'm not scared of it because I know so much about it.*

With this access to a range of information about HIV, AIDS and safe sex Chris is able to discriminate between different kinds of information and he is sceptical of the Department of Health material because Pat would often point out where it was deficient. Chris talked about a NZAF pamphlet that he had found useful.

C: *It just said a list of things that you could and couldn't do. That was quite handy, cos you could just sit down and say "right well I'll make a decision that I'll do that, I won't do that".*

While Chris presents this as a rationally-based decision-making process, Chris's risk-taking and risk-avoidance behaviour is mediated by other knowledge that he had about his body. Because he feels that he knows his body quite well and that prior to Alex did not feel he had been exposed to HIV, Chris had told at least one sexual partner that he was safe and on this occasion had engaged in unprotected anal intercourse.

C: *There was one guy who was here one night who, he liked it as well, he liked to be fucked. So we did that, and that wasn't safe. So I feel a bit bad about that, especially in case I passed it on to him.*

A: *How come you didn't have safe sex? Did you discuss it at all?*

C: *No, it just sort of happened. It just sort of went ahead. It was before I knew about Alex. Now I would definitely not do anything unsafe. But I just s'pose I was a bit, I don't know if it was selfish or whatever, so I just sort of said, "I haven't got it so you don't have to worry".*

A Fateful Moment and the Loss of Innocence

Chris divides his sexual life into two main parts, that is before finding out about Alex's HIV status and after this knowledge. Before this 'fateful moment' Chris had sometimes had unprotected anal intercourse - both as the insertive and receptive partner. Unsafe sex before knowledge about Alex can be explained in relation to Chris's belief that he knows his body

well enough to know that he has not sero-converted, even though he has not had an HIV test. This is combined with a belief in the trustworthiness of his regular partners, who were described as 'lovely' and it is assumed that they would not lie to him about their own HIV status.

The following extract illustrates how Chris's trust in Alex's claims of being HIV-free, in addition to a belief in his own HIV-negative status, contributed to a risky encounter.

C: *I've never actually spoken to Alex. And my feelings are just to leave it, to forget the whole thing. I mean we didn't practice safe sex. Before I met him I knew all about safe sex, what to do and all that sort of thing. And then he came along and he actually told me that he'd had the tests and he was negative. So he really lied to me. And he told me lots of things, and he never told me anything about that.*

A: *So when you said that he said the test was negative did you think that maybe you should have safe sex, or did you think "oh well that means everything is ok"?*

C: *Well I sort of thought that meant that everything was ok. I don't know if I was lucky or what, but he was the one who liked being fucked more, and so that's what we did most of the time. But I was just reading an article lately that says it's almost just as dangerous for both sides anyway. And that scared me a bit. But we didn't see each other that often anyway. But I know you only have to see someone once really, that's all it takes. But I really don't think that I have got it. Of course I could be wrong. But I'm healthy at the moment and after that whole experience there's no way now that I would ever have unsafe sex. That really quite scared me at the time, still does a bit. I know if I started losing weight or having sweats or anything like that, I'd go straight away and have a test just to make sure. But I don't think it's necessary at the moment.*

Several things seem to be evident from this extract, and are supported by other parts of Chris's interviews. Firstly Chris's knowledge about the necessity for safe sex and ability to have and enjoy safe sexual practices did not stop him from engaging in anal sex where he was the insertive partner. This is a practice that is less risky than being the receptive partner however it does carry some risk. Chris also reflects on an article which suggests he might have put himself at risk through being the insertive partner but this expert knowledge is placed alongside an argument that the risk was minimal because Chris and Alex did not 'see each other often'. What stopped Chris from seeing this sexual encounter as one where safe sex should still have been practiced was the fact that Alex told him that he had been tested and that he was HIV negative. Chris also believed himself to be negative on the basis of his

own bodily knowledge. Chris trusted that his sexual partner was telling the truth, and that his body would have told him if he was HIV positive therefore he saw this encounter as one that was safe by virtue of his belief that neither partner was HIV positive. In general then Chris's judgement of a safe encounter comes from the combination of trust in the other person's integrity and his own body. Chris retains his trust in his body and so does not feel that it is necessary to have an HIV test.

C: *I had a good friend who is a doctor and I had a good talk to him about it, and he said that if it was him he'd rush off and have the test straight away. But I don't feel like that. Because I go to the gym a lot I feel like I know my body quite well and like when I get a cold or sniffles or anything like that I just sense it coming on quite early, I'm tuned into myself or something. And I don't have this feeling that there's anything wrong with me.*

Chris says that as a consequence of finding out about Alex, he doesn't feel that he could ever really trust someone totally now.

C: *I don't think having had an experience of thinking that I was really in love with someone and then doing unsafe things because I totally trusted them, I mean you put total trust in this other person and ah.. I don't think I you can say that you would be safe if you haven't sort of been through that experience before. I don't know that I could totally trust anyone now, anymore.*

It is hard to know with any certainty whether Chris can maintain a regime of safe sexual practice. However, given the degree to which he has felt betrayed and that he is reluctant to trust his sexual partners, it seems likely that in the immediate future Chris will avoid any non-intimate sex. This may be a safe, if not sexually rewarding, strategy for the short-term but does not solve the problem of what to do in the context of an intimate, love relationship. This is something that Chris very much wants for himself. His claims that he will always have safe sex, 'even with Mr Right', may be tempered by Chris's continuing faith that he would know if he had sero-converted.

Graeme

Personal and Sexual History

Graeme is a twenty-one year old clerical worker in a government department. At the time of interviewing he had been sexually active for about eighteen months and has only ever had safe sex. Until he was about eighteen, Graeme felt that he was a straight man who was

attracted to men and hoped that it was 'just a phase' he was passing through. Coming out was quite a struggle because he had a picture of being gay as an 'illness or something'. He says that his 'quasi-religious background' meant that he had problems reconciling what he was doing with his religious beliefs about what was right. In talking about this process Graeme viewed coming out as a journey with distinct steps that had to be negotiated. He navigated a path through his own hestitations about his sexual desires where his image of what gay men were like did not fit his views of himself. Along the way he sought guidance from experts. Initially he decided that he should talk to a psychiatrist to help him sort out his feelings about his attraction to men. He believed that it would be useful to talk things over with an 'objective' person and he wanted a 'wise and qualified opinion'. However, as Graeme became more accepting of his desires he sought out gay-produced knowledge. On the basis of this knowledge he readjusted his ideas about what being gay involved and he began to see a place for himself there. He then entered the gay social world in a more public way through attending a gay ball and eventually joining Gay Switchboard and going to gay nightclubs.

Graeme's growing awareness of sexual desires for men and his becoming sexually active, all occurred at a time of knowing that to be gay meant having to think about HIV. Once Graeme came to an acceptance of his gay desires, he still held off having sex because of his fear of AIDS. Now he recognises that any sexual encounter with another man can put him at risk. Consequently safe sex is an everyday reality for him. He has never known anything else and accepts that his sexual life will be lived through an awareness of HIV risk.

G: *I didn't want to rush into it, especially with AIDS. I wanted it be quite right. But as it ended up I met somebody at the club and I was quite interested and so I went home with them. Afterwards I sort of thought, "well that's it", you know. [laughs] It wasn't too bad, but it wasn't like the first time was anything wonderful, I think mainly just because I couldn't relax properly.*

This reference to an inability to relax is a recurring theme in Graeme's discussion about sex.

In the eighteen months that Graeme has been sexually active he has had five sexual partners. The longest relationship lasted about three months with a man who he was in love with. One other relationship involved feelings of love but the other three did not seem to involve any emotional commitment on either man's part. Notwithstanding the casualness of three of the

five relationships, Graeme is at pains to position himself as someone who is 'not a one-night-stand person' but wants intimacy and commitment in his relationships.

Core Sexual Narrative: Being Safe, Relaxed and Responsible

Before I can do that I've got to be able to relax and before I can relax I've got to be able to trust the person. And that's why, how can you trust a person that you -   well for me anyway I can't really trust a person that I maybe only met two hours ago to that extent.

There are two narrative themes that run through Graeme's accounts of himself as a sexual person. Graeme's preferred way of seeing himself is as a particular kind of responsible and aware gay man who has put being safe at the centre of what it means to be gay. Graeme's involvement in Gay Switchboard helps in positioning himself as knowledgable, and indeed more knowledgable than many other gay men. He is happy to 'pass on information and also to argue intelligently against someone's ignorant view'. As in the process of coming out, expert knowledge helps to shape Graeme's view of what it is to be a gay man, how to assess risk and what steps to take in being safe. However, alongside this narrative of an articulate, strong and public gay self is another narrative of a more private self, in which Graeme articulates a very strong need to be relaxed in his sexual encounters. His ability, or inability, to be relaxed is a constant concern for Graeme and is linked to the perceived trustworthiness of his partners. This was a recurring theme that was raised in a number of different contexts. For Graeme to enjoy a sexual encounter, he needs to feel relaxed. In order to feel relaxed he has to trust his partner and this trust is only possible if Graeme feels that he has sufficient knowledge about his partner. This narrative around knowledge, trust and relaxation is central to Graeme's practice of safe sex and construction of himself as a particular kind of sexual and gay man.

Graeme is committed to the idea that sex should occur in the context of emotional commitment. Where sex occurs in the absence of emotional attachment Graeme feels it is a bit like 'extended masturbation'. Graeme is therefore uninterested in one-night-stands and wants to take the time to get to know someone before he has sex with them. Graeme also has very strongly held values against 'cheating' and dishonesty. For those reasons he is not interested in sexual relationships with married or bisexual men.

G: *I'm a monogamous person. I have the feeling that if I made a commitment to someone then I obviously respect them enough not to go cheating behind their back.*

One way that Graeme seeks emotional relationships is connected to his desires for men who are about ten years older than himself, and all of his sexual partners have been at least four years older than him. He favours older men because:

G: *They're much more into the emotional side of sex than just having sex for fun. It's not just another screw sort of attitude, but they're out there looking for something more.*

This is an important aspect of Graeme's views about where sex fits into his life. He is much more interested in sex in the context of a loving relationship than in sex only for pleasure.

G: *I mean the main thing I enjoy about sex is not so much climax, well of course that's nice, but the best part is afterwards when you sort of lie in each other's arms and that's the most intimate moment, I feel. And that's the bit I really like the most about sex.*

Risk Assessment: Relying on Expert Knowledge, Wanting to Trust

And I suddenly realised how strange and in a way how stupid that was. [to have sex with strangers] You know, because it really does increase the risk factor. And you know you might find out this person is really not the sort of person you wanted after all. So that's one thing that's made me think now, well, I'm not going to go really into a one-night-stand sort of thing to try and pick up people. Because you know half an hour or two hours in the evening is not enough time to get to know someone.

Graeme's interview transcript was full of detailed and sometimes anxious discussion of the need for assessing the risk involved in any sexual encounter. Graeme has never had unprotected anal intercourse and in general his views on risk are more cautious than the gay guidelines that he was very familiar with. Graeme places a great deal of trust in the expert knowledge produced by the New Zealand AIDS Foundation as well as ideas that he has gleaned from gay and other publications, talking to men who are HIV positive, his involvement in Gay Switchboard and attendance at a meeting at the local gay men's AIDS organisation. He keeps himself up to date with the literature and tends to take a more conservative approach in his own sexual practice than even gay information. Graeme feels that he knows most of what there is to know about HIV and AIDS and that rather than attend a safe sex workshop or programme he would rather go to national gay or medical conference where the level of knowledge would be very specialised. All of this is consistent with the high regard that Graeme has for 'scientific knowledge' and the trust that he places

in the knowledge that medical and gay organisations have in producing reliable guidelines. Graeme describes safe sex for him as involving mutual masturbation, caressing, body kissing, french kissing and oral sex without swallowing semen.

However Graeme is aware of that there is no absolute certainty about the knowledge of what is safe and unsafe, and that there are shifts in what practices are believed to be most risky. For example Graeme's willingness to have anal sex with condoms has changed over the time that he has been sexually active. While in the past he has had protected anal intercourse, he now says that he would not take the risk of the condom breaking or slipping. In the first interview Graeme said that he had 'great trust in condoms' however by the second interview four months, later he was much more cautious about them. In the intervening time he had been to a meeting at the local gay men's AIDS organisation and had come to the conclusion, on the basis of this meeting and some conversations that he had had with straight friends, that condoms were really not safe enough to put one's trust in. He had come to the conclusion that this was a risk that he was not prepared to take.

G: *I think when I was new on the scene, I did let people have anal sex. But now I think it's because I've come to the opinion that a) ok with a condom it's safe but there is a chance of damage or something. I'd like to know a person a lot more intimately before I'd go that far. Because basically it comes down to the fact if you don't relax it's going to hurt. And before you can relax you've got to trust someone. And before I can trust someone I've got to know them. So now if I meet a guy I won't even probably offer it to him. It just depends how I feel at that moment. At the moment do I feel like I can trust this guy by doing this.*

Here Graeme indicates that even protected anal intercourse is dangerous if he does not know the person. This lack of knowledge about a partner means he is unable to trust him sufficiently in order to relax. So for Graeme now anal intercourse, protected or not, is out of the question with most sexual partners. Thus Graeme's previous trust in condoms was broken in the light of new knowledge, but significantly this knowledge was mediated by his narrative identity.

G: *Breakage is something I'd never really considered before. In fact I put my blind faith in a condom. Then I suddenly realised that putting it in this micro bit of rubber is a bit scarey quite honestly. But there are people who are quite prepared to do that that I know. But for me at the moment that's a no go.*

Although Graeme is adamant that even sex with a condom is not really an option he is

prepared to think about this practice if he is in a relationship with someone that he has known for about six months. He feels this might be justified because after this amount of time 'I would feel trust in a person'.

G: *It's a trust thing. By six months I would know whether I really felt that this was a step I wanted to take with that person. And also the fact I think I would know a bit more about them by then, and a bit about their past*

This illustrates the way that Graeme sees knowledge about a person, and his trust in them, as almost like an additional prophylactic. It is a means, in conjuction with risk-reduction practices, that he uses to keep himself safe.

Trusting in Experts and Intimate Others

Graeme's experience of sex had been relatively limited and in many respects he could be called a sexual novice. What sexual practice Graeme has experienced has been forged out of an acknowledgement of the HIV risk that is associated with certain sexual practices. He says that he has always had safe sex and he likes to present himself as knowledgable and taking the correct gay line. Although Graeme professed in-depth knowledge about HIV/AIDS, as well as gay issues in general, he was also uncertain about his own sexual attractiveness and what he might expect for himself in the future. He placed great trust in the power of rationally-based expert knowledge but at the same time had desires for trust relations based on intimacy and a form of 'emotional knowledge'. This two-fold nature of Graeme's narrative identity explains contradictory ideas about anal sex and an occasion when Graeme had anal sex when he did not really want to.

While Graeme is worried about the risks associated with anal sex, even with condoms, this is a form of sexual expression that he desires. However because he wants to think of himself as an aware gay man, doing the right thing, he first answers a question about how he defines sex in the way that he believes reflects this HIV awareness.

G: *Well yeah this is interesting because some people I know think that anal sex is sex, and everything else is just foreplay. But as far as I'm concerned sex has a very broad definition. It doesn't even have to involve orgasm. It's just a very close personal exploration of both you and another person. I think that's how I'd define it. So you know that could be just kissing and cuddling for a couple of hours and getting quite excited about it and not actually sort of coming or anything.*

However, this seems to be something of a 'party line' and when encouraged to talk further

about what sexual practices he particularly liked, Graeme admitted that anal sex was very pleasurable, that he preferred to be the 'passive' partner, and that he thought that penetration is linked to intimacy.

G: *I also think that penetration is very intimate. You know you're getting, you're not on top of a person, you're actually within a person. And that's sort of the height of intimacy. Yeah that's probably why I enjoy that. Whereas a lot of the others are surface, in anal sex you're actually going within a person.*

This connection of intimacy with anal intercourse therefore makes sense of Graeme's desire to reintroduce this practice in a relationship of some duration. As suggested in the previous section, Graeme sees protected anal sex as a possibility in the context of a relationship in which he has knowledge of another person, can trust him and so feel relaxed enough to enjoy anal sex without feeling unduly worried about the possibility of a condom breaking. The rewards of intimacy, of 'actually going within a person', outweigh any possible residual risk.

This ideal account of trust, anal sex and intimacy however has not often been a feature of Graeme's sexual relationships. In an account of an occasion when he felt 'used' Graeme also commented on the fact that that he likes to be the more 'submissive' partner in the relationship. This refers to his desire that his partner should set the boundaries for what will happen and take some control over the sexual encounters. In this context he talked about a situation where he felt he was used by a man that he was in love with.

G: *I ended up after one incident, I felt quite used. I felt basically I had been, not raped, but basically I was just a body, not me. He wasn't making love to me but just to another man, that's all he wanted. This was a guy I fell in love with ironically enough. [laughs] You know the more I thought about it the more I felt it left a really bitter taste in my mouth. The thing was he sort of took me home but then he naturally assumed I wanted to have sex. You know he didn't even sort of ask me. He just assumed that, and he automatically, sort of after foreplay, he just donned a condom and assumed that I was going to roll over and ... [laughs]*

A: *Present your arse.*

G: *Precisely. And I sort of thought, well I let him, mainly because I was in love with him and I was not as assertive as I am now. Now, you know, I wouldn't let anyone do that, and I'd say "hey, if you expect it then you're not going to get it, you've got to make me trust you first".*

Graeme's ability to have the kind of sexual encounter he wanted was minimised because he

loved his partner. In this instance his own sexual desires and personal integrity were compromised in order to do something that his partner - whose good regard he wanted - desired. This incident was one in which Graeme felt a victim - to another's wishes and his own lack of assertiveness. Now he says that he would not have protected anal sex unless it was with someone he felt he knew well.

Bill

Personal and Sexual History

Bill is twenty-six years old and works in an administrative position in a large multinational corporation.   Although Bill was raised a Catholic he no longer practises the faith. He has been sexually active since he was twenty-one, a year in which he had a 'disastrous' sexual encounter with a woman, in which he experienced premature ejaculation. This relationship did not go any further and a second relationship with a woman was 'more serious' but there was no 'sexual contact'. Bill slowly became aware that these relationships with women were not 'doing anything' for him, and around the age of twenty-three years old he started to become aware of desires for men. Initially, however, he liked to think of himself as bisexual rather than gay. This growing awareness of being gay occurred when he was five years into a ten-year bonded period with one of the armed forces. It was during this time that Bill had his first sexual experience with another man after going to a gay club. As Bill became increasingly aware of his desires for men, he began to go to gay bars more often and started to worry about being found out. Rather than facing a 'dishonourable discharge' he found a way to leave the armed force without disgrace. For some time after this Bill kept his gay life, predominantly visits to gay bars, separate from the rest of his life. Eventually, however, he confided in a gay workmate that he also was gay. This was a relief and from then on Bill developed a wider circle of gay friends. Bill does not see being gay as the most important thing about him and does not make a habit of 'shouting it from the roof tops'. He is not out at work and believes that he might lose his job if it was known that he is gay.

Like Graeme, Bill also came to an awareness of both HIV and his own desires for men at about the same time. He commented that the knowledge about AIDS kept him from having sex with men for longer than might otherwise had been the case.

B: *Actually one of the things that's probably held me back for a wee while was that the AIDS thing was coming to publicity round about the time that I thought I was bisexual. And I think that held me back for a while, out of ignorance I think more than anything else -   which for an educated guy was bloody ridiculous. And that held me back for quite a while, not wanting to get into that kind of situation where you could put yourself at risk of catching AIDS.*

Bill has moved through various stages in his pattern of relationships with men. His initial sexual relationships were one-night-stands. He then developed two important friendships that were sexual at one stage, although they did not develop into the kind of romantic relationship that he would have liked. At the time of interviewing Bill, he had not had a relationship for over a year, although there had been 'a few mad passionate flings along the way'. Bill is now interested in finding someone that he can 'share a wee bit with'.

Bill's sexual practice has been mostly safe. His awareness that being gay might expose him to the risk of HIV was expressed in caution about having anal intercourse. He says that he has not had 'much experience of that side of things' and that it initially was a 'wee bit foreign to me' and it took him a 'bit of getting used to'. While there were fears associated with anal sex this is a practice that he has come to enjoy. Bill likes to see sex as a chance to 'have a laugh, be able to talk with somebody. As I say, I find it breaks the tension quite a bit if you can have a laugh with someone'. This desire to make light of things is a dominant theme in Bill's talk. He sees himself as a bit of a joker and likes to use humour in his relationships with people. While Bill likes to see himself as being educated, intelligent and safe there were two occasions on which he had unsafe sex. However it was discovering that a partner had been HIV positive that provided a scare that made him evaluate how he would have sex in future. He says that he is now even less likely to have unsafe sex than before.

Core Sexual Narrative: Searching for a Partner and Having Fun

I've never been one for sleeping around much anyway. As much as I'd like to, and fantasise about it, it's just not the way I am. I think I'm still looking for something a bit more long-term, I'm more into a relationship than just a fling.

I like to have a bit of a laugh when I'm in bed with somebody, it's not strictly serious - "wham, bam, thank you ma'am" and then lie back and think of England, I like to have a laugh, be able to talk with somebody. As I say, I find it breaks the tension quite a bit if you can have a laugh with somebody.

Because Bill became sexually active with men at the same time that he became aware of the risks of HIV for gay men, this recognition has fed into the narrative he builds around sex as a place to have fun as well as to experience intimacy. Having fun is part Bill's broader view of his self, in which he likes to joke and keep things light. Bill also has a set of ambivalent ideas about the value of sexual promiscuity. He sees the existence of HIV as a problem stemming from the fact that 'people had been running around with the happy gay lifestyle for years, and they could do anything they wanted with anyone they wanted'. Bill feels resentful about this because:

B: *When I decided that I was gay it stopped. I couldn't leap around California doing anything to anyone I wanted, and vice versa. All of a sudden I had to stop. You know I think I felt resentful. Why has this happened now? Ten years ago I would have been quite happy. I could have gone out, said I was gay and gone and done anything with anyone I wanted. All of a sudden you had to stop and think.*

However it is not just gay men who were lax but 'the rest of the world' who have for the last twenty years been 'running around going to bed and sleeping with anyone they wanted'. Bill associates the risk he now faces with the irresponsibility of others who were living it up - although there is also a certain desire on his own part to have been part of that freer lifestyle. Although Bill talks wistfully here of a bygone golden era in fact he does not really see himself as the kind of person who is into a 'wild lifestyle'.

Bill has quite a strong moral view about what are appropriate sexual relationships and what he wants for himself. Although he has had one-night-stands in the past, Bill does not see them as part of his future.

B: *Why have this specific mentality, just a one-night-stand, unless you're feeling really callous and you want to go out and just have sex for the sake of it? I think ultimately I'm looking for a partner when I go out and meet somebody. So I don't have a one-night-stand mentality, you know. And if it doesn't work out after that, okay it is a one-night-stand. But that's not how I go out looking for it.*

This reluctance to have one-night-stands is also connected to regret for those occasions when Bill has slept with someone out of 'desparation'.

B: *And the next day the feeling wasn't worth the night before. I think if you can lower your standards that much, it's just not - the act itself isn't worth that much.*

In addition to some cynicism about one-night-stands Bill sets himself some 'rules' that when he is in a relationship with someone he will be faithful, and he expects the same from his

partner. The best kind of sex is that which happens in the context of a loving and committed context. One-night-stands cannot provide the kind of conditions that can ensure safety and pleasurable, intimate sex. They also do not allow the forms of mutuality that Bill seeks in relationships in which each partner shares something of himself with the other.

Risk Assessment: Being Educated and Avoiding Non-intimate Sex

HIV risk is real for Bill because he is gay and he sees gay men as a reservoir of HIV infection. He has always had to think about sex with men in terms of HIV risk and he sees himself as educated, more so than 'joe public', and therefore in a position to make rational decisions. Bill puts his trust in the knowledge that he gleans from the gay and straight media and the fact that he is an 'educated bloke'. He says 'I like to sort things things out myself. They're my problems, I'll sort them out'. However, Bill's assessment of personal risk is linked to those situations in which he has little knowledge of his partner or where the encounter is governed by an ethic of sexual pleasure rather than intimacy. For example, Bill discusses a time when he was offered the possibility of a threesome. There is no reason to think that a threesome is, in itself, more risky than sex between two men, but for Bill this was an event that was clearly seen as being risky in itself.

B: *I'm not into that kind of scene at all. I mean it was bad enough trying to cope with one person, without having someone else there as well Again it probably goes back to more of the relationship side, to share with one person rather than -   threesomes are just sexual gratification and nothing more.*

Bill also explains an occasion when he had unprotected receptive anal intercourse as involving a 'one-night-fling mentality'. On this occasion he was very drunk and had picked up somebody from a gay nightclub.

B: *I picked up a guy from Alfie's[3] after the stag do, and that would have been the first time I tried anal sex. And there were no condoms or anything and I was blasted. I was really off my face that night, and I wanted to try it and so I did. And the next morning I just wasn't impressed with myself, the fact that I had actually done that.*

A: *You felt that was a stupid thing to do?*

B: *Yeah. And particularly with someone who I didn't know from a bar of soap. A wee bit dangerous.*

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3.   An Auckland gay club.

Again Bill sees the risk in this incident is related to both the act that he engaged in and the fact that he did not know his partner.   Bill recognises that he was responsible for putting himself at risk on this occasion, but also that the encounter has a relational element in which his partner could also have turned the situation into one that was safe.

B: *That was up to me, that if I didn't want to do that, I shouldn't have. The other guy in that situation should have looked after himself.   But I think that was predominantly because it was the one-night-fling mentality.*

Bill suggests that the 'one-night-fling mentality' accounted for neither man feeling responsible for the saftey of the other.

As well as seeing danger associated with sex that is concerned mostly with gratification rather than intimacy, Bill also sees risk attached to certain types of men. What this type of man 'is' remained unspecified, but Bill thought that the kind of man he would be sexually interested in would not have an STD. This belief is held in spite of giving an account of 'getting crabs' from a sexual partner, as well as discovering that a sexual partner was HIV positive.

B: *Obviously the type of person I'm going to go for, or be attracted to, well this is the ideal again, is not going to have a sexually transmitted disease.*

A: *How do you know?*

B: *That's just my ideal, my way of looking at it.*

A: *Oh right. But you know the reality might be different?*

B: *Yeah. But again you can't afford to run around expecting people to throw medical certificates under your nose first before you do anything with someone.*

Bill has a faith in his own judgement about people. He thinks that he is educated and knowledgable and that this will keep him from harm. He is prepared to trust a person on the basis of his own knowledge of them. This discussion of his own ability, or 'ideal' of being able to choose men who do not get STDS is at odds with his dicussion of other gay men who are 'silly' and think that if he's 'a nice enough guy' that they will be safe.

B: *There are lots of nice guys, Christ I know about three people who've got AIDS at the moment, or are AIDS positive, who are hell of a nice guys and probably would have thought the same thing about the guy who gave it to them.*

This ability to judge the non-infected status of others has also faced a challenge when Bill

was told by an ex-lover that he was 'AIDS positive'. Even though the two men had taken precautions Bill felt concerned that 'once or twice things got a wee bit close. And even though it would have been very, very safe sex, you still have that element of doubt'.

B: *I went for a blood test about a year ago when someone I'd been sleeping with came back and said he was AIDS positive. And that really knocked me around a bit, I think that was partly what helped me sort out my priorities a wee bit more. But you know if you can't enjoy yourself, okay there are limitations there but they're there for everybody, you can still have a lot of fun.*

Balancing Fun and Responsibility

Bill's pattern of risky and safe sex falls into two phases. Before he was aware of his ex-lover's HIV positive status he relied on a notion of himself as an educated and knowledgable man and his belief that he would only choose healthy men. He explained episodes of unsafe sex as being connected to a 'one-night-stand mentality'. While Bill finds these kinds of encounters, unsatisfactory because they cannot involve expressions of intimacy, he also likes to have fun and when drunk was less concerned with safety than with having a good time. Now that he has been 'knocked around' by discovering that he could have opened himself to HIV risk, even though his practice was safe, Bill has redoubled his efforts to ensure that sex is safe. This is also linked to his desires for an intimate relationship in which personal responsibility is a governing ethic. Bill wants a mutual relationship in which both participants take responsibility for themselves and each other.

In terms of negotiating safe sex, Bill ensures that risk is minimised by letting the other person know when he's close to coming 'letting somebody know so that no fluids are intaken, or having condoms'. An example of this approach is illustrated in an occasion when a partner started licking up the semen after Bill had ejaculated.

B: *There was one guy who I did actually have to say something to. He was getting a wee bit carried away. After you've orgasmed I think the main thing is, you get a towel, get rid of it. But he was getting more carried away, he was licking part of it up, and I said "you're not doing that with me. Do it with someone else if you want". But that's sick. You know it's just not worth it.*

Here Bill is taking some responsibility for his partner's potential risk. At this stage he did not have a test result and was working on the general principle that ingesting semen is not a good thing. Bill also balances this sense of responsibility with the idea that while safe sex can

sometimes be inconvenient and a hassle it can also be made into fun. In a discussion of how having to stop and put a condom on can 'take away a wee bit of the passion' Bill interrupts himself to comment on a British television programme ('First AIDS'):

B: *But as I think somebody said on that British program that came over, it's only if you take that kind of attitude, it's gonna be like that. You know, there's plenty you can get up to in the meantime and make it fun. I like to have a bit of a laugh when I'm in bed with somebody, it's not strictly serious*

And again on the topic of condoms:

B: *Well they're not the sexiest thing ever invented, but they're necessary. It just takes a wee bit more of an effort, but there's no reason why the fun and games should stop while somebody puts on a condom. That's the main thing to get across. You know the passion isn't suddenly spent when the little rubber thing goes on. You don't just go "oh, bugger this" and roll over and go to sleep.*

Bill sees his future as including safe sexual relationships. This involves a desire for a more serious relationship than he has had in the past. He says that he's not sure he's ever been in love, but that it is something that he would like for himself. Bill has a clear sense that he has some control over his life and at various points has made conscious decisions to change the direction of things. For example in relation to his decision to come out, even though he was worried about what HIV might mean for him:

B: *You've got to live your life how you want to. I could spend the rest of my days running around pretending I'm straight, married, having my wee flings on the side with guys, and I'm never ultimately going to be happy. So I like to try and look at it, I want to have as much fun and enjoy myself as much as possible while I'm alive, and by being gay was about the only way I was going to do it, to accept what I was and get on with living like that.*

This same view of his life is reflected when he discovered that a sexual partner had been HIV positive:

B: *It's my life I'm playing around with here, so you know I'm gonna take any precautions that have to be safe. Okay there are limitations there, but they're there for everybody. You can still have a lot of fun.*

Conclusion: Identity, Safe Sex and Sexual Freedom

HIV risk and safe sex were issues that troubled each of the gay men discussed above. They were all to varying degrees knowledgable about the means by which they might expose themselves to risk and also how they might protect themselves from HIV infection.

However, each man's response was organised in very particular ways, that I argue can be associated with their core sexual narrative. That is, there is a guiding story of the sexual self that places the men in a particular relationship to the others with whom they have sex as well as in relation to valued sexual goals. This core narrative contributes to risk assessment and in conjunction with this shapes, individual patterns of risky and safe sex. As well as providing an explanation for individual patterns of sexual action, these case studies also contribute to debates at the level of politics about the nature of identity and about which safe sex strategies should be encouraged.

In Chapter One I briefly summarised debates around how best to conceptualise 'gay' identity, given that there are significant differences in the experiences and self-understandings of MSM. I argued that two models of sexual difference predominate. One approach is to pluralise identity and to attend to the shifting nature of sexual identifications and meanings. The other approach emphasises the 'performative' nature of identity. I have argued that neither of these ways of conceptualising identity is satisfactory and that a better model takes seriously the role of ontological narratives in the constitution of sexual self-identity.

Take for example Vern's discription of himself in terms of a category, 'being morally corrupt', that exists outside of the more usual sexual identifications used by homosexually-active men. It could be argued that Vern's discussion of himself as someone who avoids saying 'who' he is because he does not want to be classified by others, demonstrates the 'performative' nature of identity. However, I would argue that Vern is only able to make sense of himself as a certain kind of 'gay' and 'morally corrupt' person in relation to some powerful guiding self-narratives that enable this positioning of himself in opposition to other identities. These self-narratives focus on Vern's view of himself as being strongly individualistic and self-reliant. He sees himself as living outside of any sexual norm, but at the same time this view is constructed in relation to certain values and against a community of others. Vern values freedom and pleasure over responsibility and intimacy. He does not see himself as belonging to the gay community, but the models of 'being gay' that are provided by such a community cannot be ignored and they form the ideals that he constructs himself in opposition to. Vern's view of himself as having a particular kind of sexual persona

takes a narrative form. He places himself in a personal history that is reflected on in the light of his libertarian ideals. Vern's construction of a sexual self-identity around being a libertine, as a kind of Don Juan, has more substantive and value-laden content than the notion of performative identity allows.

What do these case studies contribute to the debates about 'negotiated safety'? In Chapter One I suggested that arguments in favour of a universal safe sex strategy were procedural and therefore did not pay sufficient attention to the way in which a meaningful level of sexual autonomy is connected to the individual's desire for the recognition of their 'authentic' selves. What this means in terms of sexual practice is that safe sex strategies have their best chance of being both safe and involving some meaningful degree of 'freedom', where they are developed in ways that take seriously the desires of individuals for particular practices and relationships. These desires are articulated through narratives of the self in which individuals connect knowledge about risk and safe sex to their own personal sense of being a particular kind of gay man. Contrary to Giddens' view of the centrality of trust in expert systems to the construction of self-identity, I would argue that it is desired forms of personal trust relations that shape sexual self-identity and sexual practice.

In the preceding case studies there are many examples of men taking risks through trusting others, even where they have little concrete evidence that their trust is warranted. It might therefore be argued that this demonstrates that 'negotiated safety' is a strategy that is neither safe nor truly negotiated. I would certainly not want to support strategies in which individuals relied on 'a hope and a prayer'. However, I believe that wanting to trust a loved other is part of what Hollway calls the search for 'mutual recognition' that is at the heart of intimate sexual relationships (Hollway, 1996:105). In circumstances where a desire for mutual love exists, there are strong grounds for accepting that forms of negotiated safety are probably unavoidable, and more strongly, entirely desirable as ways of living a safe and satisfying sexual life. The important analytical question however is to decide which forms of negotiated safety satisfy both the gay safe sex dictim that sex should be life-affirming, satisfy emotional needs and keep gay men alive (*How to Have Sex in an Epidemic*) as well as an ethic of love (Weeks, 1995:172-185). This ethic enjoins individuals to care about

others in ways that respects their autonomy and that is based upon a mutual expectation of care in response. Such care requires a level of responsibility to the self and others. And responsibility in turn, requires a respect for the other's dignity. Finally, knowledge of others requires a 'delicacy of concern which is sensitive to the needs of our partners, creating a space for understanding where difference can flourish while solidarity grows' (Weeks, 1995:184).

These ethical considerations are useful guidelines for deciding what is *desirable* in gay sexual practice. However, unless such guidelines are connected to understanding the ways in which sexual autonomy is *constrained* in sex between men, they will be of limited value. What is required is an attention to those questions of power relations and empowerment that have been developed within feminist theory. At the level of personal practice the ability to reflexively question elements of cultural norms surrounding being gay, or gay sex, or being in love is an important step in developing a degree of personal autonomy. Individuals must be able to articulate these needs in ways that others will recognise and take seriously. Moreover this process cannot proceed in any meaningful fashion unless it is connected to individuals' narrative identities.

CHAPTER SEVEN

RISK AND FREEDOM IN WOMEN'S SEXUAL RELATIONSHIPS

Safe Heterosex? The Body and Trust

HIV risk does not figure highly in the consciousness of most women in the West, where AIDS is commonly believed to be a disease of gay men. Feminist studies of women's HIV risk take as their starting point the notion that women's experience of heterosex and of HIV risk is constituted through the gendered power relations associated with the institution of heterosexuality.   Such studies are typically concerned to demonstrate how hegemonic constructions of masculine and feminine heterosexuality make it difficult for women to protect themselves against sexual risk.   Indeed it can be argued that the dominant constructions of masculinity and femininity help to constitute heterosex as *necessarily* risky. The authors of the WRAP project provide an exemplary discussion of this argument and suggest that an 'ideology of appropriate femininity' positions women as passive. With such a definition of femininity there is no 'overriding conception of a positive and enjoyable female sexuality in which women are both acceptably feminine and in control of their sexuality' (Holland, Ramazanoglu, Scott, Sharpe and Thomson, 1992:143). This form of 'passive femininity' is identified as the dominant model of femininity and is an 'unsafe sexual strategy'. While it is accepted that gendered sexual relations are in many respects risky for women there is also some recognition that women are not completely powerless in their relationships with men, and that there do exist possibilities for keeping themselves safe and having the kinds of sexual relationships that they want.

This broad agreement that the dominant constructions of feminine sexuality limit women's sexual autonomy and safety informs feminist empirical studies that have sought to explore more precisely how women's risk of HIV is constituted through heterosexual practice. These studies have focused on issues related to women's condom use, the meanings of non-

penetrative and oral sex, relationship patterns, perception of risky partners etc. I argue that it is possible to identify two main realms of risk that underlie the various aspects of sexual practice that have been studied. Firstly, there are those risks and concerns associated with the bodily dimension of sex (women's desires for pleasure and gratification). Secondly, there are risks associated with the desire for intimacy and trust in women's relationships with men.

Women's ability to have safe and pleasurable sex is partly related to their control over the bodily experience of sex. As suggested in Chapter Two, safe or risky sex is a form of bodily performance and as such involves the interrelation of symbolic and kinetic processes. An important aspect of the construction of heterosexual practice is that coitus is the dominant understanding of what sex 'is' among heterosexual women. This 'coital imperative' scripts sexual encounters so that penetrative intercourse is seen as the 'natural' outcome of sexual desire. Such a structuring of sexual encounters often marginalises women's pleasure because many women find it difficult to achieve orgasms through coitus. The privileging of forms of sexual practice that are central to male pleasure is also clear when looking at how difficult it is for women to convince men that non-penetrative sex is real sex (see Maxwell and Boyle, 1995; Thomson and Holland, 1994; Wight, 1992; Crawford, Kippax and Waldby, 1994; and Ryan and Gavey, in press). Where non-penetrative and oral sex is accepted as part of a sexual repertoire it is typically understood as foreplay rather than the 'main event' (see Roberts, Kippax, Spongberg and Crawford, 1996).

In addition to the structuring of heterosexual practice around coitus there is widely shared belief that sex should be spontaneous and 'natural'. This contributes to a reluctance on the part of men and women to use barrier forms of contraception. The pill is therefore a favoured method of contraception. It is perceived as not only reliable but also unobtrusive because it does not interrupt the act of intercourse and allows 'spontaneous' sex (Thomson and Holland, 1994:20-21). The major problem with an ideal of spontaneity (connected as it is to an ideology of romantic love) is that it is opposed to the rational safe sex messages which focus on making choices on the basis of knowledge. Rational safe sex messages are 'antithetical to an ideology of femininity which constructs sex as relinquishing control in the face of love' (Thomson and Holland, 1994:21).

These bodily aspects of heterosex (as ideally coital and spontaneous) contribute to a situation in which feminine sexuality is disembodied. It has been suggested that there is a 'careful social construction of [women's] disembodied sexuality' which involves a *'detachment* from their sensuality and *alienation* from their material bodies' (Holland, Ramazanoglu, Sharpe and Thomson, 1994b:24 - my emphasis). Women are encouraged to see their bodies as passive and the objects of male desire. They are therefore constrained from exercising their own 'bodily appetites', which are often constructed as being 'unnatural' or 'unseemly' (Holland, Ramazanoglu, Sharpe and Thomson, 1994b:25). The WRAP authors suggest that most young women do not have a conciousness that they are living a disembodied femininity, and so lack an important component of sexual agency and risk-prevention. Where women are able to exercise a critical consciousness of an embodied sexuality and desire of their own they may be able to challenge men's power and have the kind of safe, pleasurable sex that they desire (Holland, Ramazanoglu, Sharpe and Thomson, 1994:35).

The bodily dimension of sex, concerned with pleasure and gratification, exists alongside women's desires for sexual intimacy. Often women value the *relationships* they have with men more than the gratification aspects of sex. Many women want sex to be a place in which they can experience love, care and affection from their partners. It is these intimacy desires that come into play around the practice of safe sex in women's relationships with men, most commonly through condom use. Condoms are not neutral and carry connotations of being most appropriate in casual sexual encounters. Where women are involved in relationships that are perceived as committed or long term condoms are usually replaced by other forms of contraception, such as the pill. In a committed relationship there is an expectation of trust in the partner not to put the woman at risk from STDs (see Willig, 1994; Holland, Ramazanoglu, Scott, Sharpe and Thomson, 1991). Studies of female sex workers have also suggested that condoms are used on those occasions where sex is seen as 'work'. However in love relationships condoms are abandoned partly as an attempt to differentiate sex in this context from impersonal, work-sex. On this issue Austen Woods quotes one of the sex workers she interviewed ' "You're having sex with a condom. You're making love without"' (Woods, 1996:132).

This reluctance on the part of women to use condoms with the men they love or are committed to was also noted by Sobo in her study of disadvantaged black women in the United States. 'Condomlessness' was viewed as a 'sign of trust' and 'honesty' and 'commitment'. 'One woman said "It makes me feel like the relationship is strong and healthy and trustworthy and faithful"'(Sobo, 1995:110). For these women, to use condoms signaled a lack of mutual trust. This view formed part of what Sobo labelled the 'monogamy narrative' about 'an idealized, monogamous, heterosexual union - the kind of union that participants feel brings the most status and esteem' (Sobo, 1995:115). This narrative involves a belief that neither partner is cheating because they love each other. Therefore women trust that condomless sex is safe. Where women subscribed to a monogamy narrative they also believed that to have safe sex would be to 'signal infidelity' (Sobo, 1995:117). This monogamy narrative is very similar to what Carla Willig calls the 'marital discourse'. In Willig's study of men and women who were married or in long term relationships, there was a common construction of this kind of relationship as 'a condition incompatible with condom use' because marriage is 'safe by definition', based as it is on relations of trust between partners (Willig, 1994:113).

There are two layers of argument in this chapter. The first is concerned with demonstrating how women construct core sexual narratives that help shape their practice of risky and safe sex. These narratives deal with both the bodily and intimacy-related elements of sex that were outlined above. However these issues only take on meaning as they become mobilised by the ontological narratives that women construct. The following discussion of four women's lives seeks to explain individual patterns of behaviour through the core sexual narratives that they construct. The second argument addresses the issue raised in Chapter One regarding what conditions empower women to have safe and pleasurable sex. One particularly powerful argument explored there concerned the notion that the permissive discourse, plus a women-centred discourse, provided the best means for women to keep safe. In the conclusion to this chapter I will suggest that this argument must be tempered with an understanding of the role of narrativity in women's sexual agency. A permissive discourse is made meaningful in many different ways. Moreover such a discourse does not always provide the kind of empowerment that is promised, given that desires for sexual gratification

often exist, and are weighed up, in the context of desires for love and commitment.

Odette

Personal and Sexual History

Odette is a twenty year-old heterosexual woman working as a receptionist-typist in a small business. She left school at the age of sixteen, without School Certificate, and has had a series of short term waitressing jobs in addition to several periods of unemployment. Odette's early family life was somewhat stormy. Her father is an alcoholic and was often out of control. Odette's parents divorced when she was seven and she lived with her mother after this time.

Odette's first sexual experience was at the age of fourteen with her eighteen year old boyfriend when he picked her up from school in his coffee break. Odette described painful intercourse happening over a matter of minutes. Because she did not enjoy this experience Odette says that she prefers to see her 'real first time' as the occasion when she first enjoyed the sex. This occured in the context of a new relationship later in the same year. Odette constructs a story in which her sex life is divided into three stages. During the first period, from the age of fourteen to about sixteen, Odette had an unspecified number (i.e. 'lots') of boyfriends. She says of this time that:

> O: *I was basically a child and an adult at the same time. I was enjoying myself. I didn't feel used or anything, it was just what I wanted to do. I mean if I met someone, and I didn't fancy them I would say so. But if we went out once and I didn't like doing anything sexual then I would say so, but if I wanted to then we would.*

This period is characterised by Odette's engagement in casual sex but it is also a time in which she saw herself as having some power in determining when and where she would have sex. The second period covers a year or so, when at the age of seventeen Odette left Wellington and moved to a smaller provincial centre. She was unemployed for much of this time during which she had three 'permanent' relationships and some 'short term ones'. These relationships were problematic and at least one of her boyfriends was violent. The third period covers the last two years. After she returned to Wellington 'all free and single again' Odette almost immediately moved into a 'permanent' relationship with her current boyfriend Patrick.

This current relationship was the subject of much of the discussion during, and outside of, the interviews. Eventhough Odette said that she was in love with Patrick 'the man', she was deeply unhappy, has never really felt any sexual desire for him, and does not trust him. She did not understand why she did not feel any desire for Patrick and found his demands for sex oppressive. However she usually acquiesced to these demands because 'he goes crazy if he doesn't have sex every day'. Odette resents the pressure that she is under to have sex when she does not want to but she feels unable to say no all the time nor does she feel able to leave the relationship. Odette talks about Patrick's anger when she resists having sex with him. She interprets the lack of sexual desire for Patrick as her 'sexual problem' and accepts that Patrick has a right to have sex with her when he wants to.

O: *Patrick is draining me of my energy, by moaning and whinging and carrying on all the time. And I suppose he's got a right to in a way but it's not helping me, it makes me really upset. And I know he's really upset. Still doesn't help me when he starts taking it out on me.... He's definitely been real nasty to me as it got worse, cause it has got worse.*

At one period when Patrick's nastiness got too much to bear Odette broke off the relationship for a period of about three months. During this time Patrick had sex with several women and Odette with one man. Odette saw Patrick's sexual activity as putting her at risk because his sexual partners were all 'toe-rags'.

O: *They were all ex-prostitutes and strippers and real bags from bloody Vivian St and who knows what else* .[1]

Odette on the other hand did not see that she was at risk because she had sex with only one person during the break up while he had tried to 'do the whole circuit of women in Wellington when we broke up'.

Neither Patrick nor Odette practiced safe sex in their relationships with each other or other partners. Odette's sexual practice puts her at risk of pregnancy, STDs and HIV. During the six years that Odette has been sexually active she has used contraceptives only infrequently and not at all in the last four years. She stopped using the pill when she was unemployed because she could not afford it, she put on weight and it made her feel depressed. Odette has not conceived during that time and believes that she is probably infertile. Odette defines safe

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1.   Vivian St is the red-light district of Wellington.

sex as intercourse with condoms. However she does not believe that she needs to use condoms for HIV protection in her current relationship. Condom use for HIV protection is restricted to sex when she is 'single' (by this she means that she is sexually active but not commited to her partners through the establishment in her mind of a permanent relationship). However Odette does occasionally use condoms with Patrick if they are going out somewhere.

O: *If he wants a quick one or something and I can't be bothered rushing to the bathroom afterwards. It's a really convenient thing if you're in a hurry somewhere or something. There's not all that hassle afterwards. So we've just used them for convenience up till now.*

Core Sexual Narrative: Being Stuck in 'Permanent' Untrustworthy Relationships

That's what I hate about permanent relationships, it's not being able to trust someone - it's a really agonising, tiring feeling.

Odette's discussion of her sexual life is focussed primarily around a tension between being 'single and free' and being 'stuck in permanent relationships'. While Odette values both states (for different reasons) the 'permanent relationship' is prioritised as offering her best chance for love and being taken care of. Odette also believes that such relationships can provide her with the 'security' that she wants. While being single is a state that is valued by Odette it is one she has difficulty sustaining - 'I seem to have this tendency to get long term relationships all the time'. A significant down side of 'permanent relationships' is that it is difficult to trust the men she is involved with. In her current relationship Odette has a constant fear that Patrick will be unfaithful to her. She wants the relationship to be honest but she recognises this is difficult to achieve in relationships with men. 'I hate the feeling of not being able to trust someone'. This trust is a belief in sexual fidelity but she doesn't think that men are very good at that.

O: *I dislike relationships with men because men a lot of the time have this excuse, like they might go off to a party or something and end up doing something with another girl and then blaming it on the booze. [...] Patrick's used that excuse with me twice. [...] I'd like to be able to say to him "yeah sure go off with the guys every Friday night to the pub", you know. But I've got this constant fear inside me that he's going to get drunk and be unfaithful.*

For Odette 'permanance' acts a signifier of the desire for stability rather than the actuality of being with someone for a long time. There is little recognition of her own desires for sexual pleasure or ability to achieve these in her relationships and in this sense she clearly lacks the

kind of embodiment that the WRAP authors suggest is central to women's empowerment in their sexual relationships. Sex is primarily understood as the context for a loving relationship in which she would be valued for who she is.   Unfortunately Odette's 'permanent' relationships with men have not typically been characterised by love, affection or concern for her well being. While Odette wants to have permanent relationships she also talks about being single as a good state because she is 'free' and there is no expectation that she should trust her fleeting partners. The only times when Odette talks about herself as having any sexual agency or enjoying her sexual relationships is when she is 'single'. She spoke of a brief fling with an older English tourist. This was a romantic and exciting affair in which she felt cherished and sexually fulfilled. The knowledge that this relationship was only a fling meant that Odette had no expectations that her partner should be trustworthy.

The narrative of permanent relationships as both desired (because they *should* involve love, security and trust) but inherently untrustworthy (in her experience) contributes to Odette seeing herself as a victim. These relationships happen *to* her, she has great difficulty leaving relationships even when she recognises that they are not nurturing, and are indeed harmful. She feels she has more power to say yes or no to the kinds of sex that she wants when she is 'single'. In this context sex is primarily undestood as an exchange of bodily pleasures and is therefore relatively unproblematic for Odette. However in her permanent relationships Odette often ends up having sex to pacify her boyfriends. These sexual encounters do not take her desires into account and there is little recognition in Odette's talk of sex as a site of her pleasure.

To summarise, the main way in which Odette makes sense of her sexual relationships is through a dualism between casual, pleasurable, free, 'single' sex and commited, largley unpleasant, permanent relationships. The latter are favoured and the events of her sexual life are organised in relation to this narrative. For Odette commitment, faithfulness, and trustworthiness are important evaluative criteria that she uses to judge her relationships with men. These are much more important for Odette than considerations of sexual gratification. In relation to the issues of HIV risk, although Odette says that she hates the untrustworthiness of permanent relationships, she believes that being in a relationship

protects her from the risks associated with HIV or other STDs. She would only consider using condoms regularly if she was 'single' again.

> ### Risk Assessment: Being Safe in Permanent Relationships
>
> *Well at the moment I'm living with someone and he's the only person I'm having sex with so ... and he can't stand using condoms. But I don't sort of think we need to anyway. He's had an AIDS test.*

Odette, like most of the women I interviewed, said that HIV risk was an issue for everyone.

O: *Oh I've probably, definitely been at risk. I mean whoever you sleep with you're risking it again aren't you? It hasn't effected me too much. Well I don't know, it's just something that's there that you have to sort of live with now isn't it?*

This general recognition of risk is not connected to her own sexual practice because:

O: *You know basically all this came out after I'd been in relationships for keeps. I've never actually been single at any time since all this came out. Of course it's always been around, for some time now, but I didn't actually know about it until I was actually with someone.*

Odette places herself in relation to a public and personal 'AIDS time-line'. She has some notion of when AIDS 'began' in New Zealand. Her own risk is related to the fact that she is only sleeping with one person at the moment and that her earlier 'single' and promiscuous practise happened before HIV was present.

Odette's assessment of her HIV risk is clearly related to the core narrative of sexuality and self that was described in the previous section. Risk is associated with casual sexual relationships and permanent relationships are safe because they are expected to be monogamous. Indeed Odette uses the existence of AIDS as further support for her view that relationships should be monogamous.

O: *And I think it's interesting how it's changed other things. Like marriage has apparently become more popular. And it's another reason why people should be faithful to each other.*

Odette holds to the view that there is little or no risk of HIV in permanent relationships eventhough she fears that Patrick (and any man with whom she is in a relationship) will be unfaithful.

Odette has accurate information about how HIV is transmitted but has a rather limited notion

of safe sex as intercourse with condoms. She has faith that Patrick's 'AIDS test' was accurate (if indeed he did have one, Odette only has his work about this) but was not aware that the test might not show HIV infection because of the window of time when there is undetectable infectivity. Odette does not believe that she has to have a test because her only risk is indirect and associated with the 'suspect women' that Patrick slept with. Odette's faith in the scientific certainty of an 'AIDS test' is mediated through the narrative of permanence. This discourse is shared by a number of her women friends, none of whom thinks that they are at risk because they also have 'permanent boyfriends'. Odette therefore believes that a strategy of permanent relationships or condom use when she is single will protect her from HIV infection. In addition to the trust in the scientific knowledge available through the 'AIDS test' Odette is persuaded by a Department of Health campaign that focused on the need for heterosexual couples to use condoms. She comments in particular on one television advertisement targetted at heterosexual men to take responsibility for using condoms. Odette thinks that if she was 'single again' she would be backed up by this campaign to encourage men to use condoms.

O: *Yeah they're really good. They really make you more firm you know. Like I was thinking if I was single it really backs me up. I really have no hassles saying "look wear it or lump it". It would really boost me, give me a lot of confidence.*

Again this is an indication that Odette feels she has more power to assert what she wants when she is 'single'. It is in such situations that the expert knowledge provided by the Department of Health is applied to her own life because these relationships lack the expectation of monogamy that structure permanent relationships.

The Poverty of 'Permanence': Neither Secure nor Safe

Odette's characterisation of herself as being stuck in 'permanent relationships, that are problematic in various ways, has shaped her sexual practice. Her approach to taking precautions about HIV infection is organised around the notion that when she is in 'permanent relationships' she is protected by the presumption of monogamy. When she is 'single' Odette recognises that she might be at some risk and she therefore uses condoms in those situations. This is not a very safe pattern of sexual behaviour and can be explained in relation to Odette's complex and contradictory characterisation of permanent relationships as safe (because there is a presumption of monogamy) while at the same time her partners

are typically viewed as untrustworthy.

Odette is a woman deeply unhappy with her current state of affairs and she sees no obvious way of improving things for herself. Her ability to have sexual relationships in conditions that she is in control of are extremely limited. The only positive discussion of a sexual relationship was Odette's romanticised account of her affair with the English tourist. Odette knew that the relationship was limited by time and she seemed able to have enjoyable sex in these circumstances. Other accounts of sex indicate that Odette has little sense of her own ability to determine when and how sex happens. For example she did not understand her first sexual experience, on the occasion of her 'real' first time her second boyfriend managed to 'slip it in' without her conscious choice, and she has sex with Patrick to 'keep him happy' (whereas she says that she has sex when she is single because she wants to). Moreover Odette characterises most of her permanent, but unsatisfactory, relationships as something she 'accidentally slips into'. While Odette calls herself a feminist and has some recognition of the way that men have unjust expectations and power in relationships she is unable to see a way to demand anything else for herself.

Raewynne

Personal and Sexual History

Raewynne is a twenty-two year old heterosexual woman with a work history in marketing. She grew up in a small central North Island town and was raised as a Catholic in a family of six. Raewynne has had what she calls two 'decent relationships' and a number of one night stands or 'flings' that were largely unsatisfactory . The two significant relationships were with her first boyfriend (from age fifteen to eighteen) and her current relationship of just under a year's duration. Raewynne's first sexual experience was not pleasurable. It happened after a party at which she finally 'gave in' to her boyfriend's requests for sex. He had been wanting to have sex for some time before this but Raewynne felt scared and that it was wrong. She says that without her boyfriend's suggestion that they have sex she probably would not have thought of it. On the night of the party Raewynne resisted for a time but eventually gave in. Raewynne does not know why she changed her mind 'from one hour to the next' but says that in the end 'I just wanted to, I wanted to see what it was like'.

There was no feeling of sexual desire on her part but Raewynne was curious about what sex would feel like. While this first experience was painful Raewynne thought that it could only get better and over the course of their three year relationship the sex between the couple did improve. Raewynne attributes this to the time spent talking about what they both wanted.

When she finished her schooling Raewynne shifted to Wellington for work. This move also marked the end of her Raewynne's relationship and she was celibate for some time before having a number of casual sexual encounters over an eight month period. Most of these were with friends or men that she knew through her social network, and one was a stranger. While these sexual encounters gave Raewynne some sexual pleasure she did not like the fact that they could not provide the opportunity for communication or intimacy and eventually Raewynne stopped having sex altogether. At this time she went off the pill and did not have sex for nearly two years until she met the man that she is now going out with. Raewynne describes sex with Brendan is an enjoyable exchange of pleasures. They take their time over sex and while intercourse is a central aspect of their sexual repertoire other sexual practices are also important. Raewynne has a relatively expansive view of what sex is including oral sex as an important element of her sexual repertoire. Raewynne's talk about sex, in contrast to that of Odette, is of a practice that is enjoyed, is mutually satisfying and that incorporates variety as well as the importance of her own pleasure. She is articulate about her own sexual desires for particular men and for the kind of sex that she wants.

Raewynne has been fairly careful about protecting herself from pregnancy. She used condoms for the first eighteen months in her first relationship before going on the pill. She relied on the pill for the period when she was having casual relationships. In her current relationship Raewynne and Brendan used condoms for the first month (although not the first time they had sex) after which time Raewynne went on the pill because 'if you're having regular sex you need to be on the pill'. Condoms are not considered to be a viable means of contraceptive protection. Sex with condoms is 'not as natural or nice - it's easier without - condoms don't make sex as enjoyable for us'.

Core Sexual Narrative: Seeking Reciprocal Sexual Intimacy

Sex without love is sort of just a heat exchange sort of thing. For sex to be really enjoyable, and to be probably what it really should be, there's got to be intimacy.

The consistent theme in Raewynne's narrative of sexual relationships is the importance of intimacy, communication and mutuality in her relationships with men. Sex outside of this context, while not 'wrong', does not embody the kind of reciprocity that Raewynne expects and seeks from her relationships. Raewynne describes this desire for intimacy and mutuality as having developed out of her first relationship. While the sexual aspect of this relationship began from pressure from her boyfriend, Raewynne came to value the way in which she was able to communicate her own desires and learn about those of her partner.

R: *We talked quite a lot about what we wanted in sex. He really wanted to know, he'd ask me "what do you like, do you like this?" - that sort of thing. It was quite good because it was both our first relationships. We could be quite open about it, and we were both learning at the same time.*

Both Raewynne and her boyfriend wanted an emotional relationship and she saw this relationship as one where they *both* 'put things in'. This experience has led Raewynne to feel that in a relationship where there is intimacy and communication she is able to have the kind of sexual pleasure that she likes. This involves 'taking time' and doing a lot of kissing and cuddling. This early pattern of communication was seen as a good way to organise her relationships and this pattern of talking about what Raewynne liked was carried over into other relationships.

R: *I often think that it was quite a good base because you could get to know somebody, and you could get to know sex itself. I mean you could get to know what he likes, rather than just starting off with say ten different people and you haven't got any idea what - when I think about the flings that I had, the different people that I've been with - I still think the ones where I've probably just gone out and got fucked probably weren't that good (laughs) So generally I think a good one is where you can talk about it.*

Achieving the kinds of sexual pleasure that Raewynne likes is linked to the ability to communicate with her partner and her expectation that the relationship will have a degree of mutuality. Moreover these qualities are also valued as good aspects of sex in themselves. This core narrative can be seen as means of making sense of the period when Raewynne had a series of short-term flings.

R: *After a while I thought "Oh no, it's not for me, I don't like this too much". Like before that I'd had all those years with somebody that I knew really well and was sort of in love with, and then there's all these one night stands. I just realized that it wasn't really me after a while. [...] The actual physical side didn't really worry me that much. It was more having that communication with somebody, that really personal, close, interrelationship which I didn't feel that I got with these one night stands, which is probably why I gave it up (laughs). They were more just a physical transaction (laughs). I didn't really get a lot out of it. I think that the contact and the communication and the exchange of emotions that goes on in close relationships is what I like.*

Although Raewynne had these flings she does not see that pattern of sexual relating as a part of her self-image. She prefers to have sex in a relationship where there is love and intimacy. Under such conditions the sex is a 'giving of your whole self' and giving more of yourself than you do with friends. This giving is presumed to be reciprocal - 'in the hope that you're getting it back again'.

While the qualities of reciprocity, communication and intimacy may not always be present in Raewynne's relationships they are the criteria by which her relationships are judged. Moreover the expression of mutuality and communication has helped to ensure that Raewynne receives the sexual pleasures that she desires. Raewynne's current relationship is valued because it incorporates the kind of sexual intimacy and mutuality that is desired and her discussion about the first time that she and Brendan had sex is shaped through her core narrative. Raewynne met Brendan at a dance where he was playing in the band. They went home and had 'really, really good sex' on a par with what she had been able to achieve with her first boyfriend. While this encounter began like many of her previous flings Raewynne marked this one out as special and different because the sexual pleasure had been linked to a level of 'interaction' that had been absent from other casual relationships. Even before Raewynne and Brendan established a more on-going relationship Raewynne was determined to see the first sexual encounter as good because it had been characterised by communication and enjoyment, and a feeling that they had known each other for years.

Risk Assessment: Relying on the Test and a Responsible Partner

I think about it, but I don't do anything about it. (laughs) I sort of think that he's pretty responsible really. I think he'd be quite careful about it. You know when we've talked about it , or if one of us thinks that we might have a bladder infection or something like that we just be careful or don't have sex. I've just got the feeling that I think he's been quite responsible about it all.

Raewynne uses a different form of knowledge to make sense of general HIV/AIDS issues from that used in the assessment of her own risk. Raewynne has a relatively accurate understanding about how HIV can be sexually transmitted. She has obtained most of this from talking with a 'knowledgable friend' and reading books on sexual health. A general level of risk is therefore associated with any sexual activity because of the difficulty of knowing if anyone is infected.

R: A lot of the time a person wouldn't know if they were infected. So that's a risk that you take when you have sex with anybody. I mean you're not going to know.

However while Raewynne reflects in the abstract that there is a difficulty in knowing if a partner is infected this uncertainty is resolved in her current relationship by a faith in the scientific knowledge provided by medical tests combined with a belief that Brendan is a responsible person. Raewynne mentioned that she and Brendan both had 'tests' early on in their relationship because Brendan had NSU. Raewynne believes that the results have shown both to be free of HIV infection. However it seems unlikely that the tests included one for HIV (Raewynne only had a 'swab and a smear'). When I mentioned to Raewynne that she could not be tested for HIV this way she expressed a general concern but concluded that because Brendan was trustworthy and responsible she was probably not at risk and it is this faith in Brendan's responsibility that she relies on. Raewynne extrapolates from the pattern of communication that she and Brendan have established in their relationship to include his previous relationships. Brendan is therefore viewed as being trustworthy because of the level of communication in their relationship. Given the significance that Raewynne places on mutuality, intimacy and communication in relationships it is no surprise that she trusts that being faithful will keep her safe from HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases.

Raewynne was aware that there was a contradiction between her belief that HIV was a problem for all sexually active individuals with her failure to see HIV as a threat for herself.

She explained this in terms of the lack of visibility of women with AIDS.

R: *One thing that sort of scares me, like when I was younger I really didn't like the*
        thought of getting pregnant. I worried that I would, so I used condoms. And I
        wonder if - because when you're young you see women, or girls your age pregnant
        and you think "I don't want that happening to me". So you can see what would
        happen. I mean you don't grow up seeing people get AIDS. Cause we used to have
        people every year at school from when you're thirteen getting pregnant. You'd just
        see it all around you and you'd think "no, that's not for me". Whereas you're not
        confronted with the AIDS thing.

Here Raewynne is recognising that there is a level of risk in her own practice and that this might be linked to the absence of an 'experiential' form of knowledge about HIV for heterosexual women.

Sexual Intimacy in the Context of Reciprocity: Rewarding but Risky

It is possible to see Raewynne as having considerably more ability to have the kinds of sexual relationships that she wants than Odette. This can be linked to Raewynne's own positioning of herself as an active agent in choosing relationships and more importantly in talking through what she wants with the men that she is involved with.   Raewynne's experience of pleasurable sex is connected to a communicative rationality and to the placement of sex in intimate relationships. However this communicative and mutualist rationality is not sufficient to ensure that Raewynne engages in an informed process of securing 'safe sex' for herself. While she can take care of her contraceptive needs Raewynne does not see herself at risk from AIDS.   This can be explained partly through the general lack of connection for Raewynne between being heterosexual and actual risk, but also through the idea that being in a faithful relationship is 'safe' in itself.

Irene

Personal and Sexual History

Irene is a twenty-five year old tertiary educated librarian. She is the youngest of a large Catholic family and was raised on a dairy farm. Irene considers herself to be a feminist and politically knowledgable. She has been involved in a variety of progressive organisations including an AIDS support network and the anti-racism movement. Irene has had sex with both men and women however her sexual relationships with women have been motivated by

a sense of duty rather than desire. I interviewed Irene twice in the flat that she shares with an older sister and another woman.

More so than either Odette and Raewynne Irene had a well developed, sophisticated and nuanced way of talking about herself and her sexual relationships. She made distinctions between different kinds of sexual relationships, practices and desires and was more articulate about her desire for sexual pleasure than for intimacy or love. Irene says that she has always had 'a really healthy interest in anything to do with sex' and initially learned about sexual pleasure through masturbation. Irene started having sex with boys at the age of fifteen. Prior to her first experience of sexual intercourse she had spent a lot of time having 'grope sessions in cars on Friday and Saturday nights' but eventually decided that she wanted to try sex.

I: *I decided "right now's the time, I want to try it". So it didn't really matter in particular who it was. I remember that it was in the front seat of a car on the dog dosing strip (laughs). Probably the most unromantic place.*

Irene says that she did not start having sex 'in a serious way' until she left school after the seventh form and started working in a rural service town. These first sexual experiences with 'young farmers', described as 'one night fucks', were remembered as being very enjoyable. However Irene thought that she had sex as part of a general desire to be 'rebellious' rather than out of any actual sexual desire.

I: *I wasn't prepared to settle down so I thought I was being pretty cool in a way. You know "don't give a fuck" sort of attitude.*

After a year working in a dead end job Irene went to Auckland for university study. During this time she had a series of casual sexual relationships. On many occasions Irene have sex with men when she was drunk and afterwards would feel 'horrible and quite yicky' about it. In addition to these casual encounters Irene had about four or five relationships that seemed to be of a more enduring and significant nature. At one stage Irene was having a sexual relationship with two men at the same time. These were enjoyed because of the freedom from any 'hassles around commitment'. While most of Irene's sexual relationships were characterised by a lack of commitment on her part she fell in love for the first time in her most recent sexual relationship with Sam. This relationship seems to have been very important to Irene in that it marked a change for her away from a 'fear of commitment'. However she and Sam split up just before Irene made a move to Wellington for work. At

the time of the interviews Irene was celibate.

In addition to Irene's sexual relationships with men she has also had a number of sexual encounters with women, including a relationship of some kind over the period of a year. These sexual relationships have never been instigated by Irene and she has often had sex out of 'duty' and because she did not want to hurt the feelings of the woman.

I: *Having sex with these women was more under sufferance, it was more the women wanting to sleep with me and I thought "well why not". But I certainly didn't get as much out of it, perhaps because I wasn't really into the situation.*

Irene prefers sex with men 'in the physical sense' but commented that on the emotional side she is more drawn to women. Notwithstanding this emotional affinity with women however Irene says that she is more likely to fall in love with a man than a woman.

Irene is very clear about the sexual acts that she likes, and those that she does not like and will not do. When asked what she most likes she answered firstly with oral sex. However she prefers this to be 'performed on' her rather than the other way around. On the few occasions that she has 'done it' this has been 'not exactly duty' but clearly there was little pleasure or desire on her part. She also enjoys 'vigorous fucking' if she knows, trusts and likes her partner.

For most of the time that Irene has been sexually active she taken few precautions against HIV infection and although Irene has quite often worried about getting pregnant she has also been very lax about using contraception of any kind. For the first few months that she was sexually active Irene was not using any contraception until a friend insisted that she go on the pill. However the pill had unpleasant side effects so she eventually started to use a diaphram as protection against pregnancy. Irene explains her poor contraceptive use partly in terms of 'bringing bad things' onto herself 'and letting other people do things, or treat me in ways that I don't want'.

Core Sexual Narrative: Repositioning Rebelliousness

I think I've stopped being so self-destructive. I see my behaviour before as always being quite self-destructive cause I didn't really value myself and I didn't really care about what happened to me. And there was lots of drug taking, years of alcohol abuse. It was part of a group thing, being into cynicism, black depressions and drinking lots and sort of "fuck the world" sort of attitude. [...] I've changed my attitudes about how I relate sexually. And I prefer now to love someone before I'll have sex with them.

At the time of interviewing Irene was going through a painful and confusing process of reassessing her past relationships and what she wanted for herself in the future. I call this core narrative a 'repositioning' one. Through it Irene's sexual self-identity is undergoing an active and reflexive process in which an earlier narrative of being a sexual rebel, enjoying the fruits of a permissive discourse of sex, is being replaced with a recognition that these forms of sexual relating were 'self-destructive'. Irene feels that although she has had a lot of sexual experience, much of it enjoyable at a physical level, this has been at the expense of initimacy. Her most recent relationship, in which she fell in love with a man, was seen as especially significant because for the first time Irene faced her 'fear of commitment'. It is this kind of commitment that she now wants in any future sexual relationships. While this change of heart is seen by Irene as being empowering she is also reluctant to give up the idea that sexual pleasure is a good thing in itself. Therefore the newer view of herself as rejecting the self-destructiveness and 'victim-type mentality' of the past exists in tension with an older rebellious and permissive project. The repositioning narrative is therefore an ambivalent one. It includes Irene moving away from her fear of commitment and towards seeking intimacy in her relationships, at the same time the rebellious project is valued for setting Irene apart from what is 'normal' and it allows her to seek sexual satisfaction in her relationships. The tension between these two emphases is unresolved in Irene's talk about what she wants for herself in the future.

In the repositioning narrative Irene wants to be more open to the possibility of connecting sex and love in future relationships.

I: *I've sort of changed my attitudes about how I relate sexually. And I prefer now to love someone before I'll have sex with them.*

However this repositioning is ambivalent and Irene still relies on the older rebellious and permissive narrative for giving meaning to her actions and desires. The ambivalence that

Irene feels about this linking of sex and love can be seen in the second interview where she commented on the extract above and said that she felt a bit embarrassed about this view. She thought that it reflected a rather 'right wing sort of view' and she wanted to assure me that this was something that she thought applied to herself at the moment rather than seeing it as a general moral principle that everyone should live by. She also wanted to correct the idea even for herself that love was *necessary* to a good sexual relationship. She would be happy with 'feeling good' about the sex.

Most of Irene's talk about sex is remarkable by its lack of romanticism. Where most of the other women I interviewed understood sex through its articulation with love Irene is much more circumspect about romance. For the most part she presents herself as having been cynical about love and relationships. When drawing on a permissive discourse Irene says that she does not really like men. Her early partners were described as being 'a bit thick'. Their purpose was for her to have sex with and she got 'mental stimulation' elsewhere - predominantly from women and a few male friends. She clearly states her own likes and dislikes and is willing to assert these desires in sexual relationships. For example Irene answered a question about why she thought she had sex by answering 'basically it's for my own gratification'. When I commented that some people see sex as being as much about intimacy as sexual pleasure Irene said 'Mmm, no I don't think so. Lust is a big factor for me. I can get that emotional closeness other than in a sexual relationship'. A positive feature of having relationships with people was 'the expectation that you can have sex when you want it. I like the availability of sex'. In commenting on a friendly, rather than romantic, sexual relationship with a man Irene found this kind of relationship enjoyable because she was able to 'feel quite free'.

I: *I enjoyed it because there was no emotional commitment or tie outside of the sex [...] It was just good friends enjoying each other, so we never went round as a couple or anything.*

For Irene the experience of sex was often in the context of enjoying 'the hunt':

I: *I like the build up to actually sleeping with someone. I like the games that are played, the tension that's built up.*

Irene likes to be in control of this process and she admits that she 'can use men but I don't like people using me'.

Risk Assessment: Becoming Responsible

I'm certainly not as inclined to have one night stands the way I used to. And I think that was a mixture - I don't know what comes first, the awareness about AIDS or having had chlamydia. I just knew I can't fuck around the way I used to. I don't want that hassle anymore. I've changed the way that I see myself. My values have changed and I don't want to take unnecessary risks with AIDS.

Irene was very articulate about her own risk and has a fairly sophisticated understanding of the political issues surrounding AIDS and of the best means of reducing risk. The repositioning narrative discussed in the previous section is clearly at work in Irene's discussion of HIV risk. Her reassessment of an earlier period of risky sex as being self-destructive is connected with a more recent decision to take care of herself.

Irene's first memory about AIDS was sometime in 1983 when she became angry at the way that the media was scapegoating gay men for AIDS. For a time she worked in the Auckland AIDS Support Network as a volunteer caring for people dying of AIDS. However she did not make a personal connection with HIV risk for herself until 1984 when she was having a relationship with a married African student. Around this time there was an emphasis in some of the Department of Health AIDS campaigns that women could be at risk if they were having sex with men from the African continent.

I: *I'd been having sex with Fred and he was African, so that was a bit of a panic. I was reading something that said that if you'd been involved with anyone from Africa you should be careful. But even after that it took me a long time to see that AIDS was an issue that effected me. I could see that it effected other people and their sexual habits. (laughs) It took me about a year to realise "o-oh I'll have to change mine as well".*

Irene's intial response to this recognition was to 'stop sleeping with so many people'. However this initial strategy for keeping herself safe was not linked to condom use or other safe sex practices. In her relationship with Sam Irene did not feel that she was at any risk from HIV because Sam had been married, and presumably monogamous, for twelve years.

Irene sees her current decision to not take risks now as part of a more general change in attitude about herself and not wanting to be so 'self-destructive'. This has occurred alongside the discovery that she had contracted chlamydia and a realisation that she could be vulnerable to STDs. As a result of this change in attitude Irene says that she is now more

likely to have safe sex in the future. Irene had a good knowledge of different ways to have sex that reduced the risk of HIV infection. She listed mutual masturbation and intercourse with a condom as safe sex options. However while Irene listed non-penetrative sex as a very safe form of sex this did not fit in with her own desires around sex. In order to keep herself safe in the future Irene says:

> I: First off I wouldn't have intercourse without a condom. Ideally I'd talk with whoever it was about AIDS, about sex, about our sexual histories - but that's perhaps being a bit idealistic I think. I think the condom thing would be the first thing, and if it was going to be something more than just a few times in bed then we'd get onto talking about that.

Irene makes a distinction between casual sex and condom use and a more committed relationship that would involve discussion of sexual histories and of other safe sex options. Although she does not like condoms Irene says that she would make the effort because 'them's the breaks':

> I: It's just a thing that has to be done. And that if I know about it then I have to act it out. And I feel responsible.

This new feeling of responsibility replaces Irene's claims that in the past she has often had an 'inability to take responsibility' for contraception or protection from STDs. In relation to possible risk from women Irene believes that the risk is minimal and is well versed in potentially risky practices. Her main comment in this regard is that says that she is unlikely to have oral sex with a woman who is menstruating.

Responsibilising Rebelliousness: An Uncertain Future

Irene's identification of the rebellious and permissive project as failing her is linked to a commitment on her part to reduce her risk of HIV infection. Whether or not Irene has safe sex in her future relationships is unknowable, however there is a clear desire by Irene to 'colonise her future' by taking charge of how she acts in sexual relationships and by relying less on alcohol and drugs than she has done in the past. At present she uses a sexual regime of celibacy which, given Irene's desire for, and enjoyment of, sex seems set to be of only limited ability in fulfilling Irene's desires around sex. Indeed while Irene described herself as having been celibate since she broke up with Sam she had had a casual encounter on her visit to friends in Auckland. This incident was not initially recalled because Irene had been talking about being celibate in Wellington as part of her new life of taking care of herself.

Her time in Auckland was associated with another more sexually active state and therefore was not immediately called to mind.

While Irene seems concerned to include intimacy and love in what she seeks from sexual relationships her discussion of these is very limited in comparison to her extended, sophisticated and richly described accounts of a permissive ideal. Love and intimacy are ideals that are viewed as a way of getting out of a pattern of casual sex that was also associated with alchohol 'abuse' and a cynical view of life. However Irene's experience of sexual pleasure and a way of being sexually has developed out of a rather different set of ideals associated with gratification and getting what she wants with little concern for her partner. Unlike Raewynne there is very little discussion by Irene of the value of communication and mutuality in her relationships. Love is desired because Irene wants to be 'taken care of' but she is silent on reciprocity as an important aspect of sexual relationships. In many respects then Irene is positioned in sexual relationships in a way that is strikingly similar to that associated with the masculine position. Irene has difficulty locating for herself a new position of sexual autonomy that is not embedded in the permissive discourse. Consequently her desire to pursue sexual relationships that are safe and nurturing is difficult for her to put into practice.

Kate

Personal and Sexual History

Kate is a twenty-four year old bisexually identified university student. Kate's discussions of her sexual life are very detailed and complex covering her reflections on being bisexual, her lack of sexual assertiveness, her feelings of dissatisfaction with her body and desires around playing with power in relationships. Kate sees herself as a feminist and has been involved in a variety of women's organisations and groups including one for lesbians 'coming out' and more recently a bisexual women's group that she set up herself. Kate's interview transcripts are similar to Irene's in that she is actively reflecting on and analysing her past, present and what she hopes for in the future.

Kate had her first consensual sexual experience when she was fourteen[2]. She linked this experience to her ideas about 'free love'.

K: *I had quite bohemian, free love type ideas even at that age. And most of my friends still believed in waiting till marriage or waiting till true love and stuff like that. But I didn't, I wanted to experiment sexually a bit.*

Kate 'fucked on and off' with her first boyfriend for about a month before she was dropped and left feeling 'incredibly shattered'. In this initial experiment with 'free love', and in many of her further relationships with men, Kate received little sexual pleasure. When asked whether she enjoyed having sex with her first boyfriend Kate commented:

K: *No. It was normal male-oriented penetration, in-and-out type sex. It was enjoyable because I supposed I loved him and I felt like I was doing something for him and I liked the idea of breaking all these taboos and stuff, and having sex at such an early age. But in terms of it actually being physically enjoyable - not really that much.*

However after she broke up with her boyfriend she learnt how to masturbate.

K: *I found a book with a diagram of a cunt in it which showed where the clitoris was. I thought, "Oh, I must go and see if I can find mine, I think I've got one somewhere" - and it worked.*

However it was some time before Kate experienced any sexual pleasure with a partner.

K: *I slept with about ten men before I found anyone who had any idea about doing something that was sexually arousing to a woman, rather than just sort of fucking you.*

These first experiences of sexual pleasure were also connected with Kate's 'discovery' of feminism at sixteen. Although it took a while to 'find any men who were willing to do something besides plain old intercourse' she did meet someone who was sexually inexperienced and quite 'commited to feminist ideas'.

K: *Because he'd never slept with anybody I could sort of tell him what to do in bed (laughs). And I was the one who knew how things were done. He had to fit into that pattern. And that was fine.*

In the ten years that Kate has been sexually active she has had many casual relationships. This casual approach has been typical of her relationships with men, while her relationships with women have been characterised by more intense emotional feelings. However Kate did

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2.   Kate hinted at, but did not elaborate on, the fact that she had been sexually abused. I did not follow up this aspect of her experience because I sensed a reluctance on Kate's part to include this in her preoccupation with thinking about her bisexual identity and desires for more clearly role-defined sex.

surprise herself at one stage by falling in love with a man while travelling overseas. When I first interviewed Kate she was not in a sexual relationship and thought that at that time she was more likely to have further relationships with men. However by the second interview Kate she had started a relationship with a woman. She seemed surprised by this development and it led to further reflections on her growing desire for a sexual relationship in which she could experience being the object of desire and, as such, 'give up sexual power'.

A great deal of the three interviews I had with Kate were concerned with her reflections about being bisexual. She says that she has always felt that she was bisexual but that during the times that she has 'hung around' lesbians she felt pressure from many of them to 'convert' to lesbianism. And for a time she did 'convert', at least outwardly, while at the same time she continued to have one-night stands with men. Kate resented having to come down on one side of her bisexual desires and feels that this did not allow her to 'experiment or play around' with her identity.

Kate's contraceptive use and attempts to protect herself from sexual diseases has been variable and often non-existent. In her first relationship she sometimes used condoms with her boyfriend, and once relied on 'gladwrap and a rubberband'. At fifteen she went on the pill for about three weeks but this made her feel sick, put on weight and have mood swings. For the following two years she used an IUD and since that time she has used, in an inconsistent fashion, her diaphram, and occasionally, condoms.

Core Sexual Narrative: An Unassertive Sexual Rebel Seeks a Powerful Sexual Partner

It's just that I quite like giving up power sexually. And I quite like someone else taking control of things and me not having to be responsible.

While Kate's interviews covered a wide range of sexual topics there is a clearly articulated core narrative organised around being unassertive and of wanting to 'give up power sexually'. This view of herself as being unassertive in her sexual relationships was in the process of being reworked. Rather than *negatively evaluating* her difficulty in asserting with whom and how she wanted to have sex Kate was reworking this into a more positive self-attribute in which being unassertive was beginning to be reconceptualised as being a

'bottom'. From this position Kate saw herself as waiting on others to take sexual control and provide her with the kinds of sexual pleasure that she desires. This recently articulated desire was viewed as part of a larger rebellious project in which Kate sees herself as 'an unacceptable sexual minority among others'. Kate wants to feel that she is the object of someone else's strong desire. She hopes that there is someone who will come along and, without having to be told, know what Kate's desires are.

K: *It's just that I quite like giving up power sexually. And I quite like someone else taking control of things and me not having to be responsible. And it not having to be all kind of equal and mutual and things like that. So for things to be a bit sort of rough, and to feel like someone actually feels quite lustful towards me. More often than not in terms of the women that I've slept with the pattern has been you get into bed and you have a little cuddle and you have a little kiss. It's all really sort of gentle and sweet and romantic and things. And like I mean I'd quite like to feel like somebody really wanted to fuck me. It is really hard to find that with a woman.*

Kate says that she has found it difficult to have the kinds of sexual pleasure that she wants with women, or with people that she cares about. In both cases she feels inhibited because she thinks that they might disapprove of her desires and she is reluctant to take any risks in case it turns them off or they think that she is 'really sick'.

K: *Whereas I always feel like I can just kind of play around and do anything I want with someone that I'm not particularily emotionally caught up with. Like the guy that I was on with in Sydney for a while. We had this sort of purely sexual relationship and we just used to fuck lots and lots. And I mean that was really, really good. I mean maybe that's part of the reason why I don't seem to have had any particularily earth shattering sex with women very much (laughs), because I do get too emotionally caught up.*

This narrative, in which Kate positions herself as enjoying sex with men primarily for pleasure and sex with women primarily for emotional satisfaction, became difficult to sustain once she fell in love with a man. When this happened for the first time Kate experienced *both* sexual passion and love and it is this combination that Kate aspires to in her relationships.

Kate's construction of herself as an unassertive person is a strongly held narrative notwithstanding her own recognition that she has sometimes been able to say what she has wanted. In fact Kate talks about how her lack of sexual assertiveness has abated somewhat over time. Kate says that she has never had difficulty telling someone when she does not want to have sex but she has felt that she has had to 'manipulate' herself into situations where she could have sex with the people she wanted to. However she comments that while in

general she favours indirect ways of getting the sex she wants there are occasions when she can directly instruct her partners.

> *K: I've got better these days to the extent where I can sort of directly instruct someone in terms of "Oh, you're doing that a bit hard" or "can you move your finger down a bit" or something like that. But in the past I just wouldn't have, like I would have just lain there and suffered. Or been bored to death or something like that.*

While Kate is able to use indirect, and sometimes direct, means for having sex with people she wants, she also wants to be in a situation where somebody else will sweep her off her feet. This kind of sex is something that should come naturally. She should not have to ask for it because the right partner would 'naturally' know what to do.

> *K: But in terms of - especially all this stuff about power and sex and kind of wishing that someone would just sort of grab me and throw me on the bed or something like that or sort of ripping my clothes off - I don't know. I mean it just seems so terrifying to say it. It just seems so ridiculous. I mean I sort of... I don't know. It feels like if I was actually gonna get that from somebody then they'd kind of do it anyway, naturally. Because they would naturally feel like it and they would naturally be that kind of person and that would naturally be the kind of sex that they were into anyway.*

Being 'unassertive' and 'wanting to give up power' are understood by Kate as flip sides of the same 'natural' order. Being unassertive is seen as being an essential part of her self, in that sense it is 'natural', like her bisexuality, although somewhat undesirable. On the other hand wanting to give up power sexually is a desirable element of herself and one that should be naturally, that is without explicit negotiation or communication, recognised by her sexual partners.

Risk Assessment: Being Careless

> *I find it hard to make the connection between just plain old normal having sex and something as momentous as getting pregnant. And that applies to AIDS as well. It's just sort of carelessness and laziness and not really being able to be bothered.*

Kate articulates two very different and contradictory positions about her own risk of unwanted pregnancy and HIV. On the one hand she mentions in several places that she has often felt quite 'paranoid' and 'panicky' about getting pregnant. On the other hand:

> *K: I didn't make any real connection in my head between having unprotected sex and the possibility of me actually getting pregnant. I sort of couldn't imagine it happening.*

This contradictory view of her risk translated into inconsistent contraception and condom use. In her first relationship:

K: *It wasn't something I thought about organising myself. I mean if he happened to have condoms and he was willing to use them that was fine. [...]*
        Still to this day I've had sex quite a lot without using the diaphram even when it wouldn't have been that much of a hassle to get it and put it in. Which isn't very good.

Kate sees less risk for herself from HIV than from pregnancy. She does not think that she is in 'a high risk category' and in thinking about what she might do in the future if she had a relationship with a man says that she would like to think she would be responsible but she can not guarantee that.

K: *I'd like to say that I'd be really responsible about it, but I don't think that's necessarily the case. It would depend how I was feeling at the time. Maybe it's a thing of not being assertive enough and not wanting to ask somebody to use a condom. Then again there have been times where I have done that. I mean it does seem to depend on the individual situation in some ways. It just depends on how sort of bolshie or assertive or whatever I'm feeling.*

A: *And can you pinpoint what it is that makes you more assertive in some situations than in others?*

K: *No. I mean if I was to sleep with somebody who I knew had slept around a lot, or who was an I.V. drug user or anything like that I guess I would ask them to use a condom (laughs). I certainly hope I would.*

Kate is unsure about what risks might be associated with sex with a woman, but when she started her new relationship she did worry a bit that she might be putting her lover at risk. However the revelation of potentially risky partners by both was not translated into using any risk reduction practices.

K: *I talked to her about it, but we didn't come to any particular conclusions, or decide to do anything particularly different. And I mean she had a relationship with a man in Europe for a couple of years, so conceivably she could be carrying it too.*

Giving up Responsibility

Kate's narrative around, and practise of, sexual risk is inconsistent and contradictory. On the whole however, Kate chooses to call herself unassertive eventhough she recognises that there are times when she has been able to get what she wants. For example Kate learnt how to

masturbate after finding book that showed her where her clitoris was; feminism gave her ideas about what she might legitimately expect in terms of her own sexual pleasure; and in an early relationship with a man who had not previously had sex Kate was able to instruct him on what she wanted. Kate also recognised occasions where she is able to direct partner's to do certain things to her body in order to give her pleasure. While Kate's actual experience of sex does hint at a certain level of sexual agency this does not fit with the dominant narrative of herself as unassertive and waiting on the desire of another. In this context Kate's responses to sexual risk (in relation to both possible pregnancy and sexual disease) is not unsurprising. Kate's 'carelessness' and lack of responsibility are consistent with a sexual self-identity constructed around leaving the responsibility for her sexual pleasure and safety up to others. While being unassertive is seen as being problematic being a bottom is good. It marks Kate as a sexual rebel and part of a sexual minority. Giving up power sexually is connected iwth not wanting equality or mutuality. Kate does not want sexual encounters to have to include explicit negotiation or communication about desires. She wants to give up responsibility. However as suggested above this narrative of sexual passion as 'natural', in the sense that desire does not have to be directly articulated, runs counter to Kate's actual experience of sexual pleasure.

While Kate values being a sexual rebel and 'being more daring than the rest of the crowd' this does not actually seem to be a very powerful position for her. Being deviant and different is valorised by Kate but because she sees herself as unassertive, and in many respects powerless, she is unable to recognise and build on situations where she *has* expressed her own desires and achieved the kind of sexual encounters that she has wanted. While Kate's narrative was also similar to Irene's in that it was constructed around being a sexual rebel Irene had made changes in how she viewed past behaviour (which in some respects was towards a more conventional form, choosing celibacy as a strategy for the time being) in order to take more charge of her life. Kate on the other hand is heading off into the sexual margins ('being an unacceptable sexual minority with others') but this does not seem to be bringing her either joy or power. Indeed on reflection Kate feels dissatisfied with the process of thinking over such options.

K: Half of me keeps wishing that I'd fucking stop thinking about all this stuff. Because it's like the more you think about it, and the more you try to analyse and suss out exactly what it is you want, the more specific you get about it, and the less likely it is that you actually ever get it. And it's like I'm always gonna be measuring people up against this standard that I've finely honed and worked out through talking to you and writing things in my diary and talking to my friends and stuff. It's like it just makes it harder and harder in some ways.

Conclusion: Permissiveness and Safe Sexual Autonomy

Safe sex is a category that is of only academic interest for most of the women I interviewed. Knowledge of what was risky or safe in terms of their sexual relationships can be linked to the core sexual narratives that they constructed around intimacy and pleasure. In the preceding discussions of each woman's sexual life story I have sought to explain patterns of risky and safe sex in terms of the core narratives that each woman constructed in relation to her life. These narratives provided the means by which individual risk was incorporated into a meaningful self-identity and they explain risky and safe sex as forms of narrative action. In addition, these case studies also provide another source of knowledge that contributes to thinking through the idea introduced in Chapter One that permissive discourse provides women with the best means of keeping themselves safe.

In Chapter One I discussed some analytical problems associated with conceptualising women's sexual autonomy in relation to the ideals of 'equality' and 'independence' that informs the permissive and women-centred discourse of sexuality, respectively. I argued that these ideals do not adequately account for the dialogical nature of sexual relationships and for the way in which these relationships involve a desire for 'mutual recognition'. To this critique I would add that an understanding of narrative identity (such as has been developed in the previous three chapters) suggests that we need to understand that a permissive discourse (or any other discourse) only takes on meaning in the lives of individuals through its articulation with, or mediation through, core sexual narratives. These ontological narratives most surely draw on public discourses but these become modified in the light of a story about a whole life that includes a range of other discourses and desires. To illustrate this argument, I will briefly compare the way in which discourses around permissiveness and intimacy are articulated very differently in the narratives of the four case studies I discuss above. It is these different articulations that account for women's sexual autonomy and

safety rather than taking up the permissive discourse per se.

All of the women I interviewed made mention of some kind of permissive discourse, that is they identified a view of sex as a realm in which sexual pleasure could be prioritised and seen as a legitimate sphere of activity for women (if not always for themselves). However they each evaluated this view of sex very differently and it was understood for themselves according to their core sexual narratives. Irene's discussion of her sexual life most clearly articulated a permissive discourse. She did not think that sex and love had to go together and her sexual practice, at least in the past, had been organised largely around this discourse. However at the time of interviewing Irene was trying to reposition herself away from such a view of sex because she now saw it as not particularly empowering for herself. While she had in the past been able to pursue relationships that gave her sexual pleasure, these did not provide her with the level of sexual intimacy that she now wanted. Even though Irene saw herself as a feminist and could articulate a view that was not only permissive but that positioned women's needs as central in sexual encounters, she was not able to shape a sexual life that was safe or satisfying. In fact by prioritising a permissive discourse, Irene had great difficulty talking about intimacy in ways that were characterised by mutuality. The way in which she articulated the permissive discourse was as an individual right that did not require that consideration be taken of her partners. They were often seen as a means to a sexual end rather than as subjects with whom she might negotiate her sexual desires in a reciprocal fashion.

Kate also took up a view that saw herself in relation to a permissive discourse. She had sometimes pursued sexual relationships, with both men and women, primarily for sexual gratification. However, whereas Irene saw herself as able to assert what she wanted from her relationships, Kate saw herself as being unassertive. In many respects such a positioning of the self runs counter to the way in which subjects are generally positioned as active in the permissive discourse. Yet Kate clearly had desires to be a sexual rebel of some kind from an early age. This view of herself as a sexual rebel existed alongside of a feeling that she was naturally an unassertive person. This view was being rearticulated around a more positively evaluated desire to give up power sexually. Kate still saw this as a rebellious position to take

because it put her on the sexual margins. But it was one that did not seem to her very empowering and it gave her little joy.

Raewynne's position in relation to a permissive discourse was diametrically opposed to that of both Irene and Kate She did not see that way of positioning sex as at all beneficial for her. Raewynne had a highly developed and articulated narrative around the need for mutuality, reciprocity and communication in sexual relationships. She saw these as providing her with the means by which she might achieve both sexual pleasure and intimacy in her relationships with men. In many respects, then, Raewynne takes a position that is often associated with women in her desire to situate sex in the context of a love relationship. However Raewynne does not accept that men have the right to define how sexual encounters will be organised, and her explicit commitment to a process of communication in her relationships enabled her to secure the kind of sex and intimacy that she enjoyed.

Odette's narrative around permissiveness and her sexual relationships is articulated around a view of herself as a victim, and in many respects Odette's experience was not one of either sexual pleasure gratified nor of intimacy needs met. Odette positioned the permissive discourse with its prioritising of sexual pleasure and choice in terms of those times when she was 'single'. However this was largely in the past, and was a minor aspect of her relationships. Odette's main desire was for security in her relationships. However she found permanent relationships problematic. They rarely offered her any physical satisfactions and they involved having to put up with the untrustworthiness of her partners. Permissiveness and the power associated with being single was not available to Odette in her search for a good permanent relationship. Because 'being single' lacked the component of an assumed security to be gained from being in a committed relationship, the benefits of the permissive discourse were not able to be brought across to her permanent relationships with men.

It was clear from the accounts given by both Kate and Irene that the permissive discourse to which they held in varying degrees does not have any place for the development of trust relations. A discussion of trust is almost entirely absent in the interviews with these two women. For Irene especially, there was no expectation that her partners would be

trustworthy or that she should expect them to be so. On the contrary she has to rely on her own resources to ensure that her relationships give her the pleasure and satisfactions that she seeks. On the other hand while Kate also did not make much of the need to trust her partners, this was changing in relation to her desires to give up power sexually. If Kate was able to find the kind of partner who would 'naturally' know what she wanted and take charge of the situation then she would be willing to trust their knowledge and ability to both pleasure and take care of her. In comparison with Irene and Kate, the interview transcripts of Odette and Raewynne were permeated with a concern about the trustworthiness of their partners. For Odette this was always uncertain and unstable, while Raewynne built her trust in her partners around a process of communication that was assumed to be reciprocal. As the discussion at the beginning of this chapter suggested, there are certainly problems associated with an approach to risk assessment based on trusting one's partner, however if Hollway is correct then such a process is central to the organisation of intimate relationships in which individuals seek mutual recognition who they are.

Overall, it would appear to be misguided to see the permissive discourse (even when 'corrected' with the addition of a 'women-centred' discourse) as the best means of securing women's sexual freedom and safety. I outlined some political and ethical reasons why this might not be so in Chapter One. In addition, I believe there are aspects of the way in which the sexual self is organised around narrative identities which also provides a compelling reason why it would be foolish to see salvation in the permissive discourse. The forms of empowerment that are are presumed to be associated with the permissive discourse - that is its assumption of an experimental sexuality, that initiating sex is a powerful position for women, and its privileging of sexual pleasure over intimacy - does not adequately account for the very strong desires that women have for intimate relationships, and in particular, the desire for mutual recognition. Sexual autonomy is better located within an individual's ability to take narrative control of her life. This must also involve an ability to critique the ways in which sexual relations with men are often organised in men's interests and she must be able to communicate her desires to her partner in such a way that they are heard and acted upon. Of course, the conditions for the realisation of individual autonomy are also reliant on shifts in masculine power at a social and discursive level. In rejecting the argument that it is the

permissive discourse that empowers women, I am not suggesting that it has no merit whatsoever. There are aspects of this discourse that are worth defending and which point towards an ethical and empowering model of sexuality. However, as I have suggested throughout this thesis a better model can be found through an ethics of authenticity.

CONCLUSION

'There is no safe sex'[1].

'Saving Sex - People have got to start thinking of sex as a way of preventing this disease, not as a way of transmitting it'[2].

Between these two sentiments there lies a political and ethical divide of profound proportions. For the first author, an infectious disease doctor and self-proclaimed 'AIDS doctor to the poor', 'safe sex' does not exist because condoms can fail. The solution can be found in 'abstinence, virginity or single life-time sexual partners' (Noble, 1991:8). For Noble, personal reduction of HIV risk can be found through a strategy of *limitation* of sexual practice. On the other hand, for many gay men, safe sex can be linked to sexual *liberation*. It has become a 'practice of freedom' in as much as it continues the gay claim that sex is good, in all its diversity of practices, modes and relationships: sex can be safe; and, perhaps more importantly, 'it is a simple, not a threatening, exercise in intimacy' (Barnett, 1986:17). This second idea, that safe sex and sexual freedom are not mutually exclusive, has provided the moral impetus for this thesis. More positively, I have sought to develop a new narrative about sex in an age of risk. This is a narrative *for* 'safe sexual freedoms'. The thesis, therefore, contributes to debates amongst feminists and gay men about what meanings should be attached to safe sex. The notion of 'safe sexual freedoms' can be a seen as a political project in the sense that it is ongoing and not settled, although there are some identifiable aspects of this project that I will summarise in this conclusion. But first, it may be useful to rehearse some of the key theoretical arugments of this thesis.

An underlying current of this study has been the desire to displace postmodernist and Foucauldian forms of analysis from the centre of contemporary sexual theory and politics.

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1.   Headline for *Newsweek* article (Noble, 1991:8).

2.   Headline and quote from *New York Native* (Barnett, 1986:17).

While such approaches have sometimes provided provocative challenges to the complacencies and rigidities associated with aspects of modernist theory, they raise more questions and problems than they solve. It is therefore time to move on from the uncritical rehearsal of Foucault that too often accompanies 'radical' sexual theory. I have sought to demonstrate that some forms of modernist theorising, in conjuction with a revitalised radical humanism, can cast a certain light on questions of sexual freedom that is more revealing than that provided by postmodern frameworks. In particular I have developed my argument around an understanding of the sexual self as possessing a narrative identity (with a 'core' narrative that unifies the diverse aspects of subjectivity); and of an ethics that respects and encourages the expression of authenticity.

Throughout this thesis I have taken the concept of narrative identity as a model for thinking through questions of sexual freedom and safe sex. As I use it, narrative identity implies an understanding of individual selfhood that is constructed through guiding narrative themes. The ontological narrativity, that is at the heart of identity contributes to an explanation of the choices that individuals make around sexual risk and in relation to pleasure and intimacy. Narrative here is seen as a means of *mediating* the categorical identities that individuals find themselves within. Categorical identities, such as gender, ethnicity, sexual object choice and so on, are typically not chosen, they are either attributed by others or 'fixed' at birth or through early socialisation. However these categories take on specific meanings through being shaped into a meaningful thematic unity. This unity draws on public narratives around the appropriate way to be masculine, feminine, gay and so on, but it is more than the sum of the parts. The unity expressed through narrative identity is an important element of the authenticity that forms an ideal for the modern self.

A conceptualisation of the narrative self, which recognises at an ontological level, the diverse ways in which authenticity is narratively organised, should not be taken to imply a parallel political pluralism in which all expressions of self are accorded the same value in terms of autonomy or moral value. Such a position neglects to take seriously that different narrative identities may be in conflict with each other. What is required is an assessment of the value commitments that underlie identities in those situations where to do otherwise would

encourage inequality or the expression of relations of dominance. Narrative identities may also involve modes of self-expression that discourage the exercise of personal autonomy. Take for example Odette's narrative around 'permanent, untrustworthy relationships'. There is little room here for Odette to experience either sexual satisfactions or keep herself safe.

The question of evaluating the theoretical, political and personal narratives surrounding safe sex and sexual freedom is therefore one that cannot be avoided. I have taken seriously Benhabib's argument that because social narratives are so conflictual and irreconcilable, social criticism must give attention to 'a certain ordering of one's normative priorities, a statement of the methodological assumptions guiding one's choice of narratives, and a clarification of those principles in the name of which one speaks' (Benhabib, 1992:226). In this respect I have rejected both the substitutionalist universalism of Reich, as well as Foucault's anti-humanism. I have been guided by Charles Taylor's discussions in favour of an 'ethics of authenticity'. This moral philosophical position makes certain claims about the nature of modern subjectivity and of an appropriate ethical stance. I have argued that the sexual subject can more readily be understood in terms of authenticity than performativity. Performativity as a description of subjectivity fails to account for the dialogical and value-situated nature of humans as they construct their narrative selves and relationships with others. Moreover, a queer politics based on performativity and positionality is less 'freeing' than one based on authenticity, in the sense that performativity tends towards an atomistic ethic that takes people away from, rather than closer to, each other. Performativity is less concerned with shared mutual, responsibility than with an individualistic and creative expression of self.

To return to the title of this thesis, 'safe sexual freedoms' refers to both the *plural* forms of safe, sexual life that should be accorded moral status, as well as to a radical humanist narrative which recognises that there is some *commonality* for individuals in belonging to 'humanity'. In conditions of Western modernity (even late, or 'post' modernity) human subjectivity is characterised by an ideal of authenticity. Moreover, sexual freedom is to be understood as a particular relation between authenticity and autonomy. Much of the discussion of this thesis has been concerned to elucidate the competing theoretical meanings

given to both athenticity and autonomy, and how they should, if at all, be connected. It is my argument that an understanding of the sexual self as 'narrative identity', provides an analytically sound basis for articulating a connection between authenticity and autonomy. On these grounds it is possible to make some substantive suggestions about what safe sexual freedoms might mean.

The notion of safe sexual freedoms brings together analytical, political and ethical concerns about safety and freedom. Quite clearly, considerations about risk and safety have been at the heart of gay and feminist politics of safe sex. These two approaches have tackled the question of safe sex for their constituencies in rather different ways. For gay men, the issue of identity has been at the heart of a project of safe sex and in debates about 'gay liberation'. Safe sex debates have often centred around the nature of the gay or homosexual individual that puts himself, or others, at risk through particular sexual practices. Should safe sex promotion be based on appealing to particular gay selves? Does a safe sex culture require the development of a gay community that can incorporate all homosexually-active men, a gay community that can be inclusive in its recognition of diversity? These questions exist alongside the promotion by AIDS organisations of a universal safe sex strategy in which homosexually-active men are encouraged to use safe sex techniques in each and every sexual encounter. Curiously, those advocating a universal strategy cross the boundaries between gay liberationists, a gay community development approach, and queer theorists. My argument against such a strategy is that while it takes seriously the risk involved in homosexual sex, it is insufficiently attentive to the diversity of desires and relational needs in gay sexual practice. It may indeed be entirely appropriate for men in situations of casual sex, or where they do not know their own or their partner's HIV status, to approach protecting themselves as a strategy involving either the avoidance of anal intercourse or the use of condoms. However, where men have developed sets of personal trust relations with a loved other, then there may be other ways of protecting both one's self and another from HIV infection. An understanding of gay selves as structured through narrative identities strengthens this argument because it suggests that personal autonomy (as responsibility, respect, care and knowledge of one's self and the other) can be developed in ways that are both meaningful to individuals and that are ethically sophisticated and 'good'.

Feminist debates about safe sex have approached the question of heterosexual women's risk and safety through discussions around the need for women to be 'empowered' in their relationships with men. Debates have centred around the question of which model of sexuality provides the best conditions for women's empowerment. A longstanding division exists between those who favour 'women-centred' discourses of sexuality and those who argue that a more 'permissive' and pleasure-focused discourse offers women the best chance at sexual safety and freedom. I have argued that the two cannot be simply added together to create a new hybrid that presumably retains the best and rejects the worst of each. Neither independence nor equality, as they have been conceptualised in feminist theories of sexuality, serves women well in their heterosexual relationships. Hollway's suggestion that *mutual recognition* is an ideal at the heart of intimate sexual relationships has also been developed at the level of political and ethical models of sexuality. My argument is that feminist sexual politics should be concerned with seeking to secure the conditions in which mutual recognition might be realised. Neither a radical feminist monism nor an uncritical pluralist feminism is able to develop the theoretical means for accounting for both women's difference (from men and each other) *and* their shared 'humanity'. Therefore feminists must embrace a form of radical humanism in their deliberations about sexuality and safe sex.

To conclude, I argue that a political project for safe sexual freedoms must articulate a connection between authenticity and autonomy in relation to a particular understanding of the *subject* of these freedoms (as possessing a narrative identity), and by working with the four *values,* of care, respect, responsibility and knowledge, that Weeks has drawn together in his 'ethic of love'. A political and theoretical narrative around 'safe sexual freedoms' implies that considerations of sexual risk must not be absolutised so that all individuals are enjoined to pursue the same kinds of safe techniques. This approach does violence to the notion of authenticity, which when linked to a suitably framed democratic autonomy, is a powerful source of personal, responsible freedom. While the precise substance of what might be entailed in 'safe sexual freedoms' is as yet unclear, such a narrative provides the model for sexual practice, politics and ethics as we enter the new millenium.

METHODOLOGICAL APPENDIX

Constructing the Thesis Project

The shape of the dissertation in its finished form has been the product of a long process of defining and redefining my research problem. When I first began this project it was conceived as an attempt to understand the ways in which public discourses of safe sex interacted with the self-understandings of individuals. To this end, I began a process of collecting safe sex information (distributed by the New Zealand Department of Health, New Zealand AIDS Foundation, and Family Planning Association) and I undertook interviews with twenty-four Pakeha men and women who were in their twenties and of varying sexual identities and practices. These two bodies of 'data' were to form the basis of my research. However, over a period of time my interest shifted to a question focused on the relationship between safe sex and sexual freedom. As has been suggested throughout the thesis, this connection seems counter-intuitive. Nevertheless, it was a connection that informs much of the gay and feminist literature on safe sex. Indeed Cindy Patton's phrase that 'safer sex is sexual liberation' has been the on-going inspiration for my study. The thesis became steadily more theoretical too, as my engagement with Foucault and his influence on sexual theory, in particular, deepened. These shifts in emphasis, alongside a growing interest in narrative theory and research, have shaped how I have used the interview material that I had initially gathered. I shifted from seeking to identify some common sets of self-understandings *across* a group of individuals in relation to public discourses of safe sex, to looking at the narrative processes *within* individual's stories of their sexual practice in the context of HIV risk. Such an approach suggested that I look in detail at the narratives of the people I interviewed, and that I construct a 'meta-narrative', of sorts, of their stories. The 'core sexual narrative' that I constructed from the individuals' stories was one which both captured the individual's own situation and autonomy, but which connected to the more general theoretical and political debates.

As a first step in this process, I analysed the interview data of all those interviewed. This produced a huge body of material that provided more detail than was useful, and which was too unwieldy to present in the thesis. I decided that a smaller number of cases would adequately convey the way in which narrative identity is central to sexual practice. I also decided to focus only on the interview material of heterosexually-active women and homosexually-active men. Although I had also interviewed heterosexual men and lesbian women, for different reasons these interviews did not provide material that directly related to the question of 'safe sexual freedom' that is at the heart of this thesis. This is not to suggest that understanding the role of narrative identity in the sexual practice of heterosexual men and lesbian women is irrelevant to such a question. However, because the actual risk of HIV infection in female-to-female sex is so low, it did not seem as pressing, politically or ethically to pursue an analysis of this material in the thesis. Moreover, my discussion of the feminist safe sex project has focused on women's sexual risk and freedom in the context of *heterosexual* relations. While it can be argued that such a concern *for* women might indeed entail understanding how heterosexual men construct their own understandings of risk, pleasure, intimacy and freedom (and this was what motivated me to interview them in the first place), because I have structured this thesis *for* sexual freedom I found it increasingly difficult to write about the heterosexual men's experience in a way that could argue 'for' this on their behalf, as it were. By this I do not mean to suggest that I believe that heterosexual relations between men and women are forever doomed to the play of patriarchal power, and that heterosexual men's sexual agency must necessarily come at the expense of women's sexual autonomy. Indeed I am heartened by those intellectual, political and cultural assertions by heterosexual men of the need for responsibility alongside pleasure and intimacy in their sexual relationships. But this thesis contributes to that project only indirectly.

Basis for Selecting Case Studies for Detailed Analysis

Once the decision had been made to put aside the interviews with the heterosexual men and lesbian women, there was still a need for further selection among the homosexually-active men and heterosexually-active women. I decided to focus on four case studies from each group. Two different criteria were used in selecting each of the cases. One was in relation to the depth of information that I had obtained in the interviews. Some of the interviews

were less satisfactory in terms of providing the range of topics, and depth of discussion that allowed a narrative analysis to be developed. The other criterion involved choosing individuals whose interviews raised themes and issues that were relevant to the broader gay and feminist concerns around sexual freedom and safe sex that are raised in chapters One to Four.

The Interview Sample and Process

I interviewed a total of twenty-four individuals in their twenties (twelve men and twelve women). These individuals were selected through a snowball sampling method from contacts I made in Wellington. I chose to interview people from outside of the city where I lived and worked (Palmerston North) so as to lessen the chance of individuals feeling that they might meet up with me outside of the interviews, in situations where they might feel embarrassed about the personal nature of their disclosures.

All the interviewees were in their twenties, and although a number of them lived with their sexual partners, none were in relationships that could be characterised as having 'settled down'. This was important to the research because I was interested in that stage of the sexual career of individuals where they were past the uncertainties of first sexual relationships, but were still in the process of sorting out what they wanted for themselves in terms of pleasures, intimate relationships and so on.

Interviews were conducted in the homes or workplaces of the individuals, wherever they felt most comfortable. Half of the twenty-four respondents were interviewed at least twice (six men and six women) and a further three men and three women were each interviewed three times. These repeat interviews were conducted to enable me to follow up interesting stories that had only been touched on briefly in the initial interview, and to collect more in-depth information about personal and sexual history. Each interview took between one and two hours. In total, the interviews produced around 900 pages of transcript.

The interviews were taped and transcribed by a worker who had signed a confidentiality agreement. These transcripts were sent to the respondents for their information and to give

them the opportunity to alter anything if they thought that the transcript did not represent what they had said. No one suggested that any changes should be made.

Five of the respondents were interviewed in a joint situation. Three heterosexual women, who were contacted via an army training camp, chose to be interviewed together. The two interviews I conducted with these women provided me with some interesting material. However it seemed likely that the women were sometimes censoring themselves in front of their friends, so these interviews were less rich in detail than most of the other single interviews. Two gay men who I had initially interviewed separately also chose to have a second interview together. They were very close friends, who were living together and had at one stage been lovers. Each had also read the other's initial interview transcript and did not seem to have any qualms about talking together with me about their sexual lives.

Ethical Considerations

Before individuals committed themselves to taking part in the research they were given information about what would be required of them (one or two interviews, of one or two hours duration), and of their rights as research participants. These rights were detailed on a consent form (attached at the end of this appendix) and explained in detail. Respondents were given the opportunity to change any details on their transcripts with which they were unhappy, and they were reassured that their names, and any identifying details, would be changed in any written material produced from the study.

Initial Interview Schedule

The attached interview schedule was used in the first meeting with the respondents. It was used as a guideline, and a reminder to me, to cover particular topics. However I altered the order of the questions where necessary, and often allowed the respondents to take the discussion in directions that they were interested. Follow-up interviews were used to gain more detail on particular issues that had been raised in the initial interview, and to allow the respondents to develop stories that seemed particularly pertinent to their sense of sexual self.

Guideline For Initial Interview

Personal and Family Background

- Age

- Occupational History - what do you do for a living now?
        - what kind of jobs have you had in the past?

- Education - what schools did you go to?
        - what educational qualifications do you have?

- Religion - are you a practicing believer?
        - have you changed your religious affiliation?

- Marital Status - are you married? Have you ever been married?

- Ethnic Identification

- Where were you born?
        - brought up?
        - live now?

- How many people were there in the household you grew up in?

- Parental background - what did your parents do for a living?
        - were they highly educated people?

- What contact do you have with your family members now?

- What kind of household do you live in now?
        - what is the nature of your relationship with these people?
        - sexual?

- What kinds of organisations and groups do you belong to?
        - sports, religious, political, cultural etc.

Sexual History

- Could you tell me about your first sexual experience
        - relationship/activities with   * self?
                                           * others?
        - where, when
        - how did you feel about it at the time? Now?

- What kind of sexual relationships have you been involved with in the past?
        - can you give me a quick rundown on your sexual history to date?

- What is your current sexual situation?
    - relationship
    - acts
    - frustrations
    - desires

- What did your parents tell you about sex?

- Did you talk about sex with friends when you were growing up?

- Do you talk about sex with your friends now?
    - what do you talk about?
    - do your friends approve of what you do?

- What kind of books did you read about sex?

- When do you have sex?
    - with who?
    - what kind of situations? e.g., parties, on holiday, in love etc.

- Why do you have sex?
    - emotional need, desire, conquest, need, lust, love?

- What do you like about sexual relationships?
    - closeness, pleasure, intimacy, friendship etc.?

- What do you dislike about sexual relationships?
    - loss of independence
    - vulnerability

- What do you most like doing when you have sex?
    - do you know why?

- Do men/women like doing different things?
    - Has that been a problem?

- What do you think about being faithful?

- Do you think men/women want different things out of sexual relationships to yourself?

- Sexual reputation - stud/slut, easy/frigid etc.?

- Do you think sex and love should go together?

- Have these acts/pleasures changed over your life so far?
    - How have they changed?

- Do you know why they have changed?

•   Do you do different things with different people or in different situations?

•   Do you ever have sex when you're drunk, stoned or otherwise out-of-it?
                - when, in what situations?
                - why/why not?
                - how do you feel about sex in those situations?

Sexual Identity

[questions to ask lesbian, gay and bisexual respondents]

•   How would you describe yourself sexually? How would you identify yourself?
                - [orientation, celibate/active, monogamous/nonmonogamous]

•   Is a sexual identification important to you?
                -why/why not?

•   When did you make this identification of yourself?

•   What do you mean when you say you are ...?
                - how does this make you different from ...?

•   How does your sexual identity fit in with how you see yourself as a man or woman?
                - any conflicts?
                - where do they come from?
                - how have you resolved them?

•   Are there any other parts of yourself that come in conflict with your sexuality?
                - religion, class, ethnicity etc.

•   What/who has influenced your view of your sexual identity?
                - feminism
                - gay liberation
                - experience
                - books
                - friends
                - religion etc.

•   Have you made conscious changes in your identity?
                - in what ways?
                - why?

[questions to ask heterosexual respondents]

•   Would you consider yourself monogamous?

- Have you ever fancied a man/woman?

- What did you do about it?

Sexual Desire

- What do you think sexual desire is?
    - ie., who/what do you want/need sexually?

- What kinds of sexual desires do you have?
    - practices ie., what?
    - object of desire ie., who?
    - what situations?

- Are they strong feelings?

- Do you feel like you have much control over your desire?
    - What does it mean when you talk about control in that way?

- Have these desires changed over time?

- Have you ever tried to change those desires for some reason?
    - Why?
    - Did it work?
    - Why? Why not?

- Do you have sexual fantasies?
    - What are they?

- Is there a recognisable pattern to them?
    - recurring fantasy?
    - major themes? people? situations?

- How do you use sexual fantasy?
    eg., some people fantasize about things they'd like to do but never have?
        Others might fantasize about making their partner do what they want?

- Have you ever looked at pornography?
    - what kind?
    - when?
    - In what situations?
    - What do you like/dislike about it?

- Do you think you usually get your own way in relationships?

- Do you think people have different amounts of power in relationships?

- What has been your experience of power in sexual relationships?

- Have you ever felt in a powerful situation?

- How do you feel about power in sex?

- When you're in a relationship who usually decides when to have sex?
    - why?
    - in what situations do you initiate sex?
    - how do you feel about that?
    - would you like to change this? Why?
    - what difficulties are associated with that?

- How do you let somebody know you fancy them?

AIDS and Changing Sexual Practices

- When do you first remember becoming aware of AIDS?
    - what do you remember?
    - what did you think about it at the time?

- What have you heard about AIDS?
    - How important do you think the problem is?
    - Will it be around for a long time?

- Where did you get that information?
    - pamphlets
    - TV programmes
    - friends
    - newspapers

- Whose fault is it if somebody gets AIDS?

- Have you seen the TV programmes   First AIDS?
                                      A Death in the Family?
                                      Suzie's Story

- What do you think about the information and the programmes you've seen?

- Do you think that you know enough?

- Do you think that AIDS directly affects you?
    - Why?

- Have you changed your sexual behaviour in response to the AIDS issue?
    - [if in a relationship] have you discussed the issue with your partner?

- Have you ever changed your sexual practices?
  - eg., because of contraception, STD fear of infection, illness?

- Would you tell a sexual partner if you had an STD/AIDS?

- What do you know about safe-sex?

[if unaware of safe-sex precautions I will use a pamphlet to describe them and ask for the
reactions of the interviewees]

- What do you think about safe-sex?
  - boring
  - not an issue
  - a challenge

- What do you think about condoms?
  - have you used them?
  - how did you find it?

- Have you considered going on a safe-sex programme?
  - what were your reasons?

[end with]

- Is there anything that you would like to add?

- Have you any questions you want to ask me?

CONSENT FORM

I,.., consent, under the following conditions, to participate in the research project 'AIDS and Safe-sex'.

1. The interviewee consents to conduct two or more interviews of between one to two hours each, with the researcher, at a time mutually convenient to both.

2. The interviewee is free to withdraw from the research at any time without threat of reprisal or recrimination from the researcher.

3. Confidentiality of information gained will be ensured through the following measures.
(i) The interview tapes will only be listened to by the researcher and an assistant who will transcribe the tapes. The research assistant will sign an agreement that she/he will maintain confidentiality.
(ii) The interview tapes will not be released to anyone and will be erased when they have been transcribed.
(iii) Once the interviews have been transcribed all names will be changed, as will any special identifying characteristics if necessary.

4. The interviewee understands that the interview will cover the broad topics of their sexual history, sexual attitudes, sexual identity, current sexual practices and their attitudes about AIDS.

5. Consent is given to allow the researcher (Allanah Ryan) to use the information gained through interviews and correspondence in her PhD dissertation and any other published and unpublished texts that may result from the research.

6. Publications that arise from the research will be supplied to the interviewee if he/she wishes.

Signed

.... (Interviewee)

.... (Researcher)

.... (date)

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