

# Resisting Orientation: On the Complexities of Desire and the Limits of Identity Politics

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This thesis is dedicated to my grandfather, Robert Wood,  
who taught me to never trust government,  
  
and to C Evans (1971 – 2004)  
who gave me so much and was taken too soon.

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**Declaration**

I affirm that this thesis was composed by myself and that all of the work herein is original research. This work has been submitted for no other degree or professional qualification.

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Jamie Heckert  
November 2005



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# Table of Contents

Abstract.....	1
I. Introduction.....	3
The Complexities of Desire.....	3
The Limits of Identity Politics.....	11
Resisting Orientation.....	15
II. Identity and Difference in the Politics of Sexuality.....	17
Feminist Sex Wars.....	18
All About Queer.....	24
Debating Citizenship .....	30
Conclusion.....	40
III. Anarchism, Poststructuralism and the Politics of Sexuality:	
'Sexual Orientation' as State-Form.....	43
Queer Anarchy.....	46
The Anarchy of Poststructuralism.....	60
Conclusion: Toward Nomadic Alternatives.....	78
IV. Intimacy with Strangers: Notes on Methodology.....	79
Recruitment & Diversity.....	84
Interview data .....	85
Theorising Data.....	90
Conclusion: Rhizomic justifications.....	108
V. Two Tales of Resistance.....	109
Mark's Story .....	110
Erica's Story.....	127
Conclusions.....	137
VI. Policing the Borders: Sexual State-Forms in Action.....	139
Shame.....	142
Sexual Violence.....	147
Compulsory Sexual Orientation.....	150
Compulsory Sexual Orientation Identity.....	160
Conclusion: The State-like Relationships of Sexual Orientation.....	173
VII. Resisting Orientation: Explorations in Sexual Nomadism.....	175
Negotiating Labels.....	176
Resisting Compulsory Monogamy.....	190
Complexities of Desire.....	197
The Relational Construction of 'Sex'.....	209
Conclusions.....	218
VIII. Empowering Resistance .....	221
Subjugated Knowledges & Emotional Entitlement.....	222
Conclusions: (Anarchist) Practice.....	240
IX. Towards a World without Borders.....	245
References.....	252
Appendix I: Early Interview Schedule.....	270
Appendix II: Overambitious Interview Schedule.....	274
Appendix III: Focussed Interview Schedule.....	280
Appendix IV: Participant List.....	284





# Abstract

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Sexual orientation is the idea that everyone is either homosexual, heterosexual or bisexual and that this is a defining characteristic of individuals. Social constructionist approaches, however, have provided a strong challenge to this notion, demonstrating that these categories are historically contingent, produced through human interaction rather than the effect of human essence. The greater debate revolves around how to organise politically in response to the suffering resulting from the processes of categorisation and stigma integral to the everyday production of 'sexual orientation'. Early political responses by women and men with same-sex desires organised around a politics of sameness, that is a politics of identity, largely perceiving sexual orientation to be a characteristic of individuals which could be addressed through claims of equality. Differences of gender, 'race', class and sexuality challenged the possibilities of identity politics by demonstrating that 'sexual orientation' could not be isolated as a singular oppression. Building on these lessons and inspired by French poststructuralism and new developments in sexual activism, queer theory advocated instead a radical politics of difference, suggesting that identity politics can only continue to produce the logic of identity, complicit in the production of oppression. However, a politics of difference is largely inconsistent with the individualism upon which liberal 'democratic' State apparatuses depend. Rather than abandoning the successes of identity politics in achieving political reform through lobbying, some have advocated an intimate or sexual citizenship which attempts to integrate the importance of difference with the obvious practicality of identity and right claims. Instead, I advocate exploration of practical possibilities for a radical politics of difference. In particular, I suggest that anarchism is consistent with the insights of French poststructuralist and queer theories while providing a tradition of practical politics. In order to address questions of political practice, I had to simultaneously develop a better understanding of people's experiences of 'sexual orientation'. I chose to interview people involved in sexual relationships with partners who had a different sexual orientation identity than they did, feeling that people in these situations would have valuable insights due to their necessarily explicit negotiation of the borders of sexual orientation. The narratives produced in interviews with 16 participants supported the development of an anarchist framework of analysis. In these terms, sexual orientation is not a characteristic of individuals, but is produced through State-like practices of representation and policing. To use Deleuze and Guattari's formulation, sexual orientation is a state-form. Despite these pressures to conform, none of the participants were entirely complicit in the ongoing production of sexual orientation; they resisted. Participants' identities, desires and relationships overflowed the containment of state-forms. In resisting orientation, they actively produced alternative realities in conjunction with their partners and other people. In contrast to the representation of the State and sexual orientation, the participants experienced autonomy. This process involved the production of flexible and negotiated boundaries unlike the rigid borders of

state-forms. If, as queer theorists suggest, the hetero/homo division is central to the organisation of social life in the overdeveloped world, then resistance to that division must be very difficult. What enabled the participants to resist in such overt ways was the development of alternative ways of thinking and a sense of emotional entitlement, as advocated in anarchism. The anarchist commitment to the inseparability of ends and means results in forms of practice that are consistent with the desired aim of social organisation without domination, where individuals are highly capable of co-operating to fulfill shared desires and also flexible enough to allow for individual freedom, equally important for intimate relationships and democratic social organisation. Whether in terms of obedience to State authority or to rigid 'truths' of sexual relationships and desires, capacities for resisting orientation must necessarily be the same. In conclusion, this analysis encourages an alternative to both sexual citizenship and queer theory: anarchism as an ethics of relationships. This is consistent with the anarchist tradition as well as another, originating in feminist thought, that connects notions of 'sexual orientation' to wider political systems.

# Chapter One

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## Introduction

*I cannot escape the nagging suspicion that gay liberation has disregarded Audre Lorde's oft-quoted dictum that 'the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house,' and has, instead, contented itself with simply building a small, yet tastefully furnished addition out back.*

-- Riki Anne Wilchins, *Read My Lips*

*It is not sex that gives the pleasure, but the lover.*

-- Marge Piercy

Are you a man or a woman? Are you sexually attracted to women, men or both? The answers to these two questions, each of which is expected to be simple, determines your sexual orientation: homosexual, bisexual or heterosexual. In many popular discourses, as well as some scientific ones, sexual orientation is taken for granted as a (fixed) characteristic of individuals. This notion is a relatively recent one in Western history.

### The Complexities of Desire

According to historian Jonathan Katz (1996), the word heterosexual was first used in something like its contemporary sense in 1893. Austrian psychiatrist and sexologist Richard von Krafft-Ebing helped change the definition of sexually normal and healthy from one based on conscious efforts towards reproduction to one based on other-sex desire, thus allowing for the possibility of pleasure without reproduction. Heterosexuality did not become a popular identity in the United States until the 1920s when the notion of (male plus female) sex for procreation only began to decline. Until its construction in the late 1800s through medical and juridical discourses, the homosexual was an inconceivable identity. 'Sodomy was a category of forbidden acts; their perpetrator was nothing more than a juridical subject of them. The 19th century homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood, in

addition to being a type of life, a life form' (Foucault, 1990: 43). Challenging Katz and Foucault, Oosterhuis' (2000) history of Krafft-Ebing's sexual politics suggests that the production of sexual orientation identities – heterosexual and homosexual – was not simply a top-down process of medicalisation, but an effect of complex micropolitical relations of power and resistance (an account compatible with Foucault's methodology if not always his writing). This historical work is part of a social constructionist project which rejects the assumption of sexual orientation as a fixed characteristic of individuals. Instead, sexual orientation has been theorised as a role (McIntosh, 1998 [1968]), a script (Gagnon and Simon, 1973), a performance (Butler, 1990), a fiction (Weeks, 1995) or a narrative (Plummer, 1995) rather than an essence.

Perhaps the earliest social constructionist perspective on sexual orientation was developed by Simon and Gagnon (1998 [1967]). They argued that studies of homosexuality suffered from two key defects. The first is a simplistic and monolithic construction of the category "homosexual". The second is the obsession with aetiology. Aetiological theories largely focused on biological characteristics like genes and hormones or on dysfunctional families. Although they didn't have much to say specifically about biological models, Simon and Gagnon offered a critique of dominant theories that the development of gendered and sexualised identities are a unified phenomenon dependent upon the proximity of the family to the nuclear ideal. Even more radically, they suggested that any theory which proposes to explain a cause of homosexuality must also explain how people become heterosexual. In addition to criticising the specific limitations of aetiological theories, they also question the emphasis. Sociologically, they argued it is more interesting to understand people's experiences of identity rather than what may have ultimately caused them to inhabit that identity.

Simon and Gagnon further argued a preponderance of emphasis is placed upon the sexual aspects of the "homosexual's" life. Through being labelled deviant, homosexuality is constructed as sexual in a way in which heterosexuality is not. Even more, the "homosexual" is constructed as a type of person where the "heterosexual" is not. Although a lot has changed since 1967, including the decriminalisation and demedicalisation of homosexuality in most countries and the rise of gay and lesbian identities, the observations of Simon and Gagnon still largely apply. The increased visibility of homosexual identity has led to the limited development of the "heterosexual" as a type of person: a label largely used as a defence, an attack or to otherwise differentiate one from an either stigmatised or proud homosexuality.

This obsession with deviant sexuality and consequent labelling of the "homosexual" as a type of person creates an illusion of similarity between people so labelled. Simon and Gagnon were keen to emphasise that homosexuality is not a unitary experience. "Not only are there as many ways of being homosexual as there are of being heterosexual, but the individual homosexual, in the course of his [sic] everyday life, encounters as many choices and as many crises as the heterosexual" (p62).

Simon and Gagnon conclude by arguing that any sociological endeavour to understand the lives of homosexual people must include aspects other than sexuality including family, economics and religion. "The aims, then, of a sociological approach to homosexuality are to begin to define the factors -- both individual and situational -- that predispose the homosexual to follow one homosexual path as against others; to spell out the contingencies that will shape the career that has been embarked upon; and to trace out the patterns of living in both their pedestrian and seemingly exotic aspects. Only then will we begin to understand the homosexual. This pursuit must inevitably bring us -- though from a particular angle -- to those complex matrices wherein most human behaviour is fashioned" (p65).

Another germinal piece of social constructionist writing on sexual orientation was "The Homosexual Role" by Mary McIntosh (1998 [1968]). McIntosh begins with a sociological critique of the frequent characterisation of homosexuality as a condition of individuals. She suggests that the recognition that homosexual behaviour is not confined to those labelled "homosexuals" should lead to the development of an anti-essential conceptualisation of sexual orientation. Instead, many people evade this problem 'by retaining their assumption and puzzling over the question of how to tell whether someone is "really" homosexual or not' (p68). Medical models of sexual orientation have constructed an in between condition called bisexuality and the corresponding type of person labelled "the bisexual". 'There is no extended discussion of bisexuality; the topic is usually given a brief mention in order to clear the ground for the consideration of "true homosexuality"' (p68).

Like Simon and Gagnon, McIntosh was concerned with the obsessive research on the aetiology of homosexuality. She also felt that this line of inquiry was bound to be uninformative. On the other hand, the conceptualisation of homosexuality as a condition, she argues, is an interesting object of sociological study. 'This conception and the behaviour it supports operate as a form of social control in a society in which homosexuality is

condemned. Furthermore, the uncritical acceptance of this conception by social scientists can be traced to their concern with homosexuality as a social problem. They have tended to accept the public definition of what the problem is, and they have been implicated in the process of social control' (p69).

McIntosh argues that the social labelling of certain persons as deviants acts in roughly two ways as a mechanism of social control. First, it serves to draw a clear line between permissible and impermissible behaviour. Any tendencies towards deviant behaviour will quickly be labelled and 'immediately raise questions of a total move into a deviant role with all the sanctions that this is likely to elicit' (p69). Second, labelling segregates deviants from normals, preventing contamination. Thus, normal heterosexual people are protected from deviant homosexual practises and values. The construction of this sort of division can lead to fixed and polarised identities. Indeed, McIntosh notes the conceptualisation of sexual orientation as a condition is popular among homosexual people as well as heterosexual ones. The rigid categorisation offers justification for deviant behaviour and inhibits anxieties about ambiguous possibilities. Furthermore, it allows for the legitimization of homosexuality without challenging norms of heterosexuality.

McIntosh argues that the labelling process should be the focus of inquiry and that homosexuality should be seen as a social role rather than a condition. Role is more useful than condition, she argues, because roles (of heterosexual and homosexual) can be dichotomised in a way that behaviour cannot. She draws upon cross-cultural data to demonstrate that in many societies 'there may be much homosexual behaviour, but there are no "homosexuals"' (p71).

Finally, McIntosh offers further support for her argument that homosexuality cannot be considered a condition. The conception of homosexuality as exclusive of heterosexuality (and vice versa) is a culturally and historically specific development. Despite the dominance of this idea in our society from as long ago as early 18th century England, the reality of people's sexual lives is not so neatly categorised. She looked to Kinsey's data as a source for understanding the impact of the homosexual role (and the same time the heterosexual role) on sex categorical desire. In Kinsey's terms this included both 'psychological reactions and overt experience' (cited in McIntosh 1998 [1968]). McIntosh argued that a strong social role would result in a polarisation of sexual desire (e.g. heterosexual or homosexual), whereby experiences of attraction for members of both sexes would be relatively rare. This begs the

question of what constitutes "relatively rare". Kinsey's decision to construct five categories of bisexual desire is entirely arbitrary. Alternatively, a comparison of levels of polarisation across categories offers a useful way of looking for the effects of the social role.

Weeks (1998a) argues that a central aspect of McIntosh's germinal work was a distinction between behaviour and category. Weeks notes that this distinction does not invalidate questions of aetiology but rather 'suspends them as irrelevant to the question of the social organisation of sexuality'. Foucault as well claimed no certainty on the subject: 'On this question I have absolutely nothing to say' (cited in Weeks, 1998a: 137).

The really interesting issue is not whether there is a biological or psychological propensity that distinguishes those who are sexually attracted to people of the same gender, from those who are not -- that can safely be left to those who want to cut up brains, explore DNA, or count angels on the point of a needle. More fundamental are the meanings these propensities acquire, however or whyever they occur, the social organisations that attempt to demarcate the boundaries of meanings, and their effect on collective attitudes and individual sense of self (Weeks, 1998a: 137).

Weeks dismisses aetiology as uninteresting except perhaps to mad scientists and abstract philosophers. But, in his agnosticism, he acknowledges the possibility of essential heterosexual and homosexual desires. While I agree that the social organisation and construction of meaning surrounding desire are sociological questions of great importance, I also think that aetiology of desire can and should be addressed sociologically.

Edward Stein notes (1992) in his conclusion to *Forms of Desire* that many of the social constructionist criticisms made of essentialism are based on inessential characteristics of essentialism. He points out three characteristics attributed to essentialist models of sexual orientation and subsequently criticised. First, essentialism is charged with theorising homosexuality in particular rather than sexual orientation generally. Second, essentialism is based upon simplistic sexual orientation categories (i.e. heterosexual/homosexual binary). Third, essentialism relies upon a single explanation for the origin of sexual orientation (i.e. genetic, psychoanalytic, etc). Stein suggests that a more sophisticated essentialism is able to respond to each of these criticisms. This essentialism should explain all sexual orientations using a more complex categorisation which does not depend upon a single explanation.

I suggest that the first and third points are much easier for essentialism to address than the second. An essentialist theory of sexual orientation requires the existence of objective cross-cultural and ahistorical categories. Stein rightly notes the simplicity of Kinsey's bipolar model of sexual orientation. In his germinal studies on sexual behaviour, Kinsey (1948, 1953) rated subjects' sexual behaviour from 0 (entirely mixed-sex) to 6 (entirely same-sex). While revolutionary for its time, a linear model of gendered sexual desire is problematic in that it lumps together a broad range of people as 'bisexual'. It also places this range *in between* heterosexuality and homosexuality. Stein cites a more complex model developed through empirical work by Storms (1980) which suggests, unlike Kinsey, that same-sex and other-sex desire are independent of each other. Also unlike Kinsey, Storms' model has the advantage of being able to differentiate between a high degree of desire for both men and women and a low degree of desire for either men or women.

Another model of sexual orientation was developed by Fritz Klein (1993) which expands upon dimensions of the Kinsey model while retaining a linear understanding of gendered sexual desire. The Klein Sexual Orientation Grid (KSOG) recognises the possibility of sexual orientation changing over time; it includes ratings for past, present and future. The KSOG also includes multiple factors of sexual orientation identity including: sexual attractions, behaviours and fantasies as well as emotional and social preferences, heterosexual/homosexual lifestyle and self identification. This model is valuable because of its ability to recognise that sexual orientation identity is complex.

Combining the KSOG multi-variable understanding of 'orientation' with Storms' recognition of the independence of same-sex and other-sex desires would provide a much more robust model of sexual orientation. But no matter how complex a model of sexual orientation becomes it still presumes that the concept of sexual orientation is an accurate way of describing individuals' sexual desires. Indeed, it presumes that gender *is the definitive basis* for sexual desire. Furthermore, it presumes that gender is easily understood in binary categories of *men* and *women*. The essentialism upon which this depends contrasts with the sociological and historical work that clearly demonstrates the constructed nature of 'sexual orientation'.



Neither male nor female are clearly defined categories (see Fausto-Sterling, 1992, 2000). None of the characteristics which are used to define gender (i.e. chromosomes, genital structures, reproductive roles) splits neatly into two categories. The human species is only roughly dimorphic. Gender categories are constructed around biological tendencies rather than the consequences of an essential binary. Sexual orientation cannot be essential if gender categories are not. Sociobiological accounts, in particular, often suggest that particular sexed characteristics (e.g. waist to hip ratios) explain categorical desire (see e.g., Miller, 2000). Given that such characteristics are not neatly sexed, we might expect that essential desire for a particular waist to hip ratio would not result in desire for women, for example, but for people with narrow waists and curvaceous hips.

An emphasis on the eroticisation of binary gender categories maintains the existence of 'sexual orientation'. But, how much explanatory power does this concept have? While all the people a given person is sexually attracted to may fall within only one gender category, this is not to say that sexual desire is categorical. A person who is *only* attracted to people who are women is not attracted to *all* people who are women. The concept of sexual orientation cannot explain why this person finds some women attractive and not others. Indeed, sexual orientation cannot even explain all gendered forms of desire as the eroticisation of gendered characteristics does not always fall simply into binary categories. The quantity of pornographic images and telephone sex lines directed at heterosexual identified men eroticising the relatively recent concept of "chicks with dicks" provides one example. These images often combine a mixture of "feminine" characteristics including large breasts, make-up, big hair and feminine clothing with the "masculine" characteristic of a penis. Another example is the eroticisation of butch and femme forms of gender presentation in lesbian cultures (see Nestle, 1987). Categorically gendered constructions of sexual desire also cannot address the reality of individuals with a history of single gendered desire who find themselves only once attracted to a member of the 'inappropriate' sex. Furthermore, even sexual orientation identity itself can be eroticised. Straight women are sometimes eroticised by lesbian women (termed "lady lovers" by Susie Bright (1990)). Likewise, straight men are the subject of sexual fantasies (and realities) for many gay men. The heterosexual corollaries have been labelled "dyke daddies" or "lesbian-identified men" (Bright, 1992) and fag hags. Bisexual women have been erotically constructed as sexually adventurous and offering the opportunity of a threesome with two women for a heterosexual man. Sexual orientation is placed as central to sexual desire while other aspects of sexual preference (e.g. S/M and fetishism) are

constructed as deviations.

Other aspects of human social organisation have also been eroticised, such as class. Billy Joel's "Uptown Girl" may have been gendered, but she was certainly classed as was the voice of the singer. Another example comes from a personal advertisement site for men with same-gender desires (Gaydar, 2001). Here, a 24 -year-old white British gay man described himself as 'Looking for hot suit and tie sex with one or more boyz!!' Again, the suit and tie is gendered, as is this individual's sexual preference. But this is not the whole story. For 'hot suit and tie sex' to be intelligible, others must recognise the eroticisation of clothing and the class status and power which they represent. In fact, this particular web site offers the advertisers in the opportunity to identify with a particular style of clothing. Some of these options are obviously eroticised (e.g. military, leather, sports kit). Others (e.g. casual, alternative, formal, trendy) serve to indicate to others what "type" of person the advertiser is in order to indicate the likelihood of social/sexual attraction. Thus, it appears that clothing is eroticised because of its symbolic representation of social statuses including power, gender and class.

Not only does 'sexual orientation' have limited explanatory power in understanding the complexities of human sexual desires, practices and relationships, but efforts to interpret ourselves and each other in terms of sexual orientation categories also result in a great deal of suffering. In particular, people who experience strong same-gender desires have historically been stigmatised. The twins heterosexuality and homosexuality, born in the the 19th century, were not loved equally. Not only has human desire been split into categories, but these categories are arranged hierarchically. Bisexuality, when acknowledged as a possibility (or set of possibilities), is likely to either be romanticised or placed lower on the hierarchy than homosexuality.

Bisexuals are frequently viewed by gay and lesbian-identified individuals as possessing a degree of privilege not available to gay men and lesbians, and are viewed by many heterosexuals as amoral, hedonistic spreaders of disease and disrupters of families. This "double discrimination" by heterosexuals and the gay and lesbian communities is seldom recognized or acknowledged as a force of external oppression, yet this oppression is real and has many damaging effects on bisexuals (Ochs, 1996:217).

Politically, the question then is how to address the suffering caused by these hierarchical categories. The most popular strategy has come to be called identity politics.

## The Limits of Identity Politics

The concept of a homosexual minority group developed during the 1950s (Cory, 1951 cited in Epstein, 1998), but did not flourish until the late 1970s with the growth of gay subcultures (Epstein, 1998). Here we see the seeds of a future identity politics in 1950s US homophile organisations. 'The primary function of the homosexual group is psychological in that it provides a social context within which the homosexual can find acceptance *as a homosexual* and collect support for his deviant tendencies' (Leznoff & Westley, 1998:5 [1956]; my emphasis). This version quickly smothered an alternative approach: 'gone were the dreams of liberating society by releasing "the homosexual in everyone." Instead, homosexuals concentrated their energies on social advancement *as homosexuals*' (Epstein, 1998: 140; original emphasis). The goal of liberation was traded for an ideal of equality between homosexuality and heterosexuality.

Often, lesbian, gay and bisexual identity politics are based on a biological essentialism, arguing that equal rights should be granted to sexual minorities because their desires are 'natural' (see Stein, 1999 for discussion). Some advocates of identity politics have been able to incorporate a constructionist position by emphasising shared experience and common interests, thus modifying the foundation minimally. Seidman notes that variations of gay politics from essentialist to constructionist all depend on a notion of sameness in terms of interests.

'Gay theory has been linked to what I call a "politics of interest." This refers to politics organised around claims for rights and social, cultural, and political representation by a homosexual subject. In the early homophile quest for tolerance, in the gay liberationist project of liberating the homosexual self, or in the ethnic nationalist assertion of equal rights and representation, the gay movement has been wedded to a politics of interest' (Seidman, 1997: 153-154).

This assertion of sameness and common interests does not sit well with many people who identify as gay, lesbian or bisexual, or who think of themselves as having same-sex desires. Emphasis on shared sexual orientation identity occludes discussion of the other key social divisions including race, gender and class. It also de-emphasises sexual diversity among

people who identify as having same-sex desires. Various new forms of identity politics have developed to provide alternatives for those who feel excluded by gay politics with its emphasis on the issues of white, middle-class, able-bodied, homosexual men.

This dependence on sameness is the major limitation of identity politics. While lesbian and gay identity politics developed in order to challenge the suffering produced by sexual orientation hierarchy, it has been criticised for producing new hierarchies.

The desire to bring things into unity generates a logic of hierarchical opposition. Any move to define an identity, a closed totality, always depends on excluding some elements, separating the pure from the impure. [...] Any definition or category creates an inside/outside distinction, and logic of Identity seeks to keep those borders firmly drawn (Young, 1989: 303).

Even those who attempt to develop more nuanced theoretical positions in order to defend identity politics acknowledge the difficulties caused by difference. Steven Epstein's (1998 [1997]) defence of the ethnic minority model of gay and lesbian identity is a particularly useful example. His goal is to avoid either the "strict essentialist" (modern) and "strict constructionist" (early postmodern) understandings of identity in order to carve a path in between. Whilst he acknowledges that constructionists 'have continued to provide the most useful insightful analyses of the changing character of the gay community and gay identity' (1998:151), he is critical of constructionism because it is not 'politically useful' in that it cannot gauge concrete political strategies which are often neither essentialist nor constructionist. He offers the example, of the lesbian feminists who "have consolidated an (essentialist) conception of group difference to a significant extent - but the emphasis on identity as a conscious political choice seems to place them squarely within the constructionist camp" (142). It seems that Epstein is attempting to avoid being either essentialist or constructionist himself in the hope that it will save him from being criticised as essentialist. However, Cohen (1991) notes of Epstein's argument that while he expounds upon the political value of an ethnic identity politics, he briefly admits awareness of its limitations in his conclusion.

. . . it seems clear enough that the gay movement will never be able to forge effective alliances with other social movements unless it can address the inequalities that plague its internal organization. In this light it is worth

noting a peculiar paradox of identity politics: *while affirming a distinctive group identity that legitimately differs from the larger society, this form of political expression simultaneously imposes a "totalizing" sameness within the group: It says, this is who we "really are."* A greater appreciation for internal diversity - on racial, gender, class and even sexual dimensions - is a prerequisite if the gay movement is to move beyond "ethnic" insularity and join with other progressive causes. (75, citing Epstein 1987:47-48; emphasis Cohen's)

Cohen argues that by relegating this point as to an afterthought, Epstein's argument exemplifies the response of gay and lesbian identity politics to issues of difference, inevitably privileging sameness over difference.

A further effect of emphasising sameness on identity category is to construct its opposite as equally monolithic. In other words, gay and lesbian (or even lesbian, gay bisexual and transgender (LGBT)) minority strategies help to produce the notion of a singular heterosexual majority. In this respect, LGBT identity politics ultimately prevent that which they are seemingly working toward. Through this 'reverse discourse' (Foucault, 1990) of homosexual or gender illness come Pride, sexual identity politics reinforces the LGBT/straight and man/woman binaries rather than attempting to deconstruct them. Goffman notes that those who take this path are doomed to replicate the society which they attempt to criticise:

When the ultimate political objective is to remove stigma from differentness, the individual may find that his very efforts can politicize his own life, rendering it even more different from the normal life initially denied him . . . Further, in drawing attention to the situation of his own kind he is in some respects consolidating a public image of his differentness as a real thing and of his fellow-stigmatized as constituting a real group. On the other hand, if he seeks some kind of separateness, not assimilation, he may find that he is necessarily presenting his militant efforts in the language and style of his enemies (1963:123).

Goffman's critique of identity politics is a valuable one, though the aims of a 'normal life' and 'assimilation' also reinforce the idea of a normal majority. If the initial aim of LGBT politics was to eliminate stigma on the basis of difference, then they must not reinforce a particular shared difference, but rather deconstruct the idea that there is such a thing as 'normal.' An alternative politics could reinforce the idea that everyone is different, and that this human diversity is valuable. The key point in Goffman's critique is that this opposition to 'sameness'

based on a politics of 'sameness' is bound to reinforce the idea of normal. Goldstein and Rayner note, 'Identity-claims depend on others for their viability but this fact is rarely acknowledged by the claimants, for to do so would be to acknowledge dependency, *and this is precisely what the claimants want to deny*' (1994:371; original emphasis).

Furthermore, in producing a singular notion of heterosexuality, identity politics disguise differences (including oppressions and challenges to oppression) that exist within this broad category. Carol Smart (1996) criticises the tendency in feminist theory to tar all heterosexual possibilities with the same brush. While she acknowledges the value of feminist analysis of orthodox heterosexuality as based on the eroticisation of (power) difference, she also criticises those (e.g. Andrea Dworkin and Sheila Jeffreys) who seem to suggest that women have only two options: opt out of heterosexuality (feminist) or accept the orthodoxy (collaborator). Feminist analysis has been crucial in pointing out the ways in which the naturalisation of heterosexuality, including mechanistic and barely controllable male sexuality and passive female sexuality, has functioned to excuse rape, sexual abuse, prostitution and the perceived inconsequence of women's sexual pleasure. In other areas, feminists have suggested that it is possible for constructions of womanhood to be resisted or reconstructed. At times, however, heterosexuality has been constructed as essentially oppressive to women. Smart argues that this oppositional dualism which developed in 1970s (Leeds Revolutionary Feminist Group, 1981) debates around heterosexuality and which resurfaced in the early 1990s (e.g. Wilkinson and Kitzinger, 1993) is in danger of inhibiting progress in theorising heterosexuality.

Crucial, then, is the importance of recognising the potential diversity of heterosexualities. Despite the recognition of the diversity among non-heterosexual identified people, acknowledgement of alternative possibilities for heterosexualities has not been forthcoming. Smart argues that one explanation for this is a desire to be able to recognise 'heterosexuals' as a 'class' responsible for heterosexism and homophobia. Acknowledging diversity problematises the concept of a unitary power wielding class of heterosexuals. This is yet another way in which efforts to construct unity in identity politics cause tensions. Smart recognises the importance of critical studies of dominant identity categories, suggesting that heterosexuality needs to be examined in the same way in which masculinities and whiteness have recently been explored. While Smart argues that we must recognise potential diversity of heterosexualities, she also acknowledges that orthodox heterosexual identity/ideology has only

recently been challenged by the rise of gay/queer and lesbian/feminist criticisms. Being largely perceived as unquestionable, "heterosexual identity is therefore akin to a white colonial identity. It entails an effortless superiority, a moral rectitude, a defeat of the emotional and the neurotic by the power of unconscious struggle and, of course, the certain knowledge of masculine superiority" (Smart, 1996: 173). The question Smart poses is whether it is possible to question the unquestionable without giving up the possibility of politically alternative and pleasurable heterosexualities.

## **Resisting Orientation**

The prioritisation of sameness over difference within identity politics concerned me. In earlier research, I looked at Pride Scotland in order to evaluate criticisms of LGBT identity politics (Heckert, 2004). With this project, I wanted to get more personal. It seemed to me that efforts to conform to sexual orientation identities causes a great deal of suffering, regardless of whether one might be understood as a member of a 'sexual minority' or not. This had certainly been my own experience, as well as that of many people I cared about. Doing sexual health education work with young people has also helped me to recognise how much efforts teenagers put into doing heterosexuality. And, as various researchers have pointed out, while sexual orientation identities may be constraining, many people also find them deeply empowering (Plummer, 1995 and 2003; Seidman, 1997; Weeks, 1995; Weeks, Heaphy and Donovan, 2001). Who was I to tell people that they should give them up? At the same time, I argued that the notion of sexual orientation is an inherently oppressive one as it fixes, categorises and places into hierarchies the complexities of human desires. In order to avoid a false consciousness argument, with its inherent authoritarianism (that I know better than people who find value in these identities) I had to try to find out how people experienced sexual orientation. In keeping with my own interests and values, I wanted to understand how people resist orientation. At the same time, if I were to provide a viable alternative to identity politics, I also had to try to understand how people feel that they benefit from these identities. From these 'personal' perspectives, I aimed to contribute to the process of developing political practice, purely theoretical and applied, to overcoming 'sexual orientation' as a defining framework in so many people's lives. While some commentators suggest that the hetero/homo division is already breaking down (Giddens, 1992; Roseneil, 2002), I am not necessarily so optimistic. Regardless, it should be apparent that there is a lot more to be done on this front.

In the next chapter, I return to debates around difference in order to provide a historical grounding to my project. This also provided me an opportunity to explore different perspectives within the politics of sexuality to assist in my understanding of participants' experiences. In Chapter Three, I suggest an alternative framework for understanding sexual orientation identity and, at the same time, providing a potential basis for a more effective politics of sexuality. In Chapter Four, I describe who I spoke to, why I chose them, and how I experienced the research process. In Chapters Five through Eight, I provide analyses of participants' stories, addressing questions of personal identity and political action. And finally, I conclude with my thoughts on the possibilities of resisting orientation.



## Chapter Two

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### Identity and Difference in the Politics of Sexuality

*Different strengths we respect. Not weakness.  
What is the use in not actively engaging life?  
It passes anyhow.*

-- Marge Piercy, *Woman on the Edge of Time*

*Every man I meet wants to protect me. Can't figure out what from.*

-- Mae West

The increasing recognition that 'sexual orientation' cannot be thought of as a singular characteristic of human beings across time and space has had severe implications for the politics of sexuality. These implications can be understood in terms of historical debates about 'difference'. Early forms of gay and lesbian politics were relatively simple, based as they were on the idea that while most people were heterosexual, some were homosexual and that either should be OK. These politics were relatively simple, because they focused mostly on a singular difference, which in turn depended upon an assumption that the categories on either side of the line it drew were also singular. This was not the case. Lesbian feminists questioned what they had in common with gay men who held gender privileges within patriarchal social relations. Sex radicals challenged lesbian feminists who promoted a particular ideal of anti-patriarchal sexuality. Men and women of colour, and working-class people of various genders challenged the white and middle-class biases of gay and lesbian politics. Bisexual (e.g., Eadie, 1993) and transgender (e.g., Bornstein, 1996) people demanded inclusion, joining with lesbian and gay groups as well as creating their own movements. New forms of queer activism, such as Queer Nation and ACT UP, focused on practices and relationships rather than identities. Inspired by activism and French poststructuralist theory, queer theory criticised all forms of sexual identity as 'normalising' categories that prioritise identity, deemphasising differences

within these categories. Thus, the recent history of sexual politics in the English-speaking, overdeveloped world, can be seen in terms of a trajectory of increasing emphasis on difference. This is without even getting into debates around the globalisation of sexual identities inspired by postcolonial theory.

This trajectory is not without its critics. While early forms of lesbian and gay politics were very simple, the potential for politics compatible with poststructuralist queer theory is unclear to many. Indeed, the very concepts upon which contemporary Western left-wing 'politics' depends, including collective identities and interests, representation, and human rights, are all criticised by poststructuralist theory for placing limitations on difference. There are also far-reaching debates around the globalisation of sexual identities, inspired in part by postcolonial theory, which add further criticisms. While acknowledging the importance of these criticisms, many activists and theorists attempt to include emphasis upon difference within more traditional liberal frameworks compatible with left-wing political traditions. 'Citizenship' can be revived, some suggest, through an emphasis on inclusion of difference and recognition of the personal as political.

This chapter, focussing primarily upon writings from the United States and Great Britain, attempts to trace particular highlights of these debates offering a flavour of the complex arguments and other forms of political practice involved in the recent history of sexual politics. Beginning with debates within the feminist movement in the 1980s over issues of sexuality, commonly referred to as the 'feminist sex wars', I examine how the development of understanding sexual politics as integral to other forms of political domination has advanced through debates around difference. Second, I take a look at the development of queer theory and its critiques of identity politics as one potential inspiration for a radical politics of difference. And finally, this chapter includes an examination of arguments surrounding 'intimate' or 'sexual' citizenship as the basis for a more practical politics of difference.

## **Feminist Sex Wars**

Historically, sexuality has been a fraught topic for feminism. What has since become known as the 'feminist sex wars' involved intense debates on topics such as pornography and sadomasochism. These debates were, and still are, situated within wider questions of

difference and power. This is best understood in the context of the development of lesbian feminist politics in the US. Gay identity politics depended on an assumption of a singular shared oppression and issues of sexism were often ignored. This meant that women in 1970s US gay organisations were often expected to fulfil traditional female roles of secretary and cleaner. Furthermore, lesbian women were often told that they were homosexuals just like gay men and therefore their oppression was no different (Phelan, 1989). In response, many lesbian women began to emphasise gender as a source of their oppression, if not *the* source. Unfortunately, the (heterosexual) feminist movement was not particularly welcoming to lesbian women. Liberal organisations such as the National Organisation for Women were very image-conscious and, thus, not very lesbian-friendly (ibid.). Such experiences of exclusion encouraged the development of a separate, and exclusive, lesbian feminist subculture.

In response to exclusion and belittling of their oppression, lesbian women began to develop analyses of the 'relationship between their position as women and their status as lesbians' (Phelan, 1989: 39). In the early 1970s, lesbian feminist organisations in America (The Furies in Washington D. C.) and the United Kingdom (the Leeds Revolutionary Feminist Group) were perhaps the first to challenge the natural status of heterosexuality, arguing that it is a 'political institution' rather than an essential sexual orientation of women (Rust, 1995). Adrienne Rich developed and popularised this argument in her influential essay, *Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence* (1999 [1979]). In demonstrating the social, economic and political pressures on women to be heterosexual, Rich convincingly argues that heterosexuality as an institution does not allow for the possibility of active consent. Thus, the erasure of lesbianism from social representation, and, in particular, feminist writing, cannot be understood purely as a lesbian issue, but a women's issue. Thus, she argued that compulsory heterosexuality is a keystone of universal patriarchy.

It will require a courageous grasp of the politics and economics, as well as the cultural propaganda, of heterosexuality to carry us beyond individual cases or diversified group situations into the complex kind of overview needed to undo the power men everywhere wield over women, power which has become a model for every other form of exploitation and illegitimate control (p 217).

Like heterosexuality, then, lesbian existence should not be understood as a sexual desire, but as a political counterculture, as resistance. In fact, Rich argues for the recognition of a *lesbian continuum*, by which she includes

a range -- through each woman's life and throughout history -- of woman-identified experience, not simply the fact that woman has had or consciously desired genital sexual experience with another woman. If we expand it to embrace many more forms of primary intensity between and among women, including the sharing of a rich inner life, the bonding against male tyranny, the giving and receiving of practical and political support, [...] we begin to grasp breadths of female history and psychology which have lain out of reach as a consequence of limited, mostly clinical, definitions of lesbianism (p 210).

Thus, in one paragraph, Rich desexualises and despecifies the concept of lesbian in a move to escape clinical (read patriarchal) definitions. Alternatively, one could argue that Rich does not desexualise the lesbian figure, but reinterprets the notion of sexuality altogether. Female sexuality is an 'energy which is unconfined to any single part of the body or solely to the body itself' (p211). Alice Echols (1992 [1984]) argues that this redefinition is central to a particular strain of feminist thought during the feminist sex wars.

Cultural feminists define male and female sexuality as though they were polar opposites. Male sexuality is driven, irresponsible, genitally oriented, and potentially lethal. Female sexuality is muted, diffuse, interpersonally-oriented, and benign. Men crave power and orgasm, while women seek reciprocity and intimacy. [...] women's sexuality is assumed to be more spiritual than sexual, and considerably less central to their lives than is sexuality to men's (59-60).

But the analysis of male and female natures as opposites is not limited to sexuality. 'Lesbian-feminists see men and women as being at odds in their whole approach to the world: men, as a rule, are authoritarian, violent, cold, and women are the opposite' (Faderman, 1981:412). Male domination of women, including compulsory heterosexuality, is rejected as inherently authoritarian, providing a model for all forms of domination.

The recognition of the coercions involved in the production of 'heterosexuality' easily slides into the rejection of the possibility of women's active consensual participation in romantic/sexual relationships with men. The libertarian impulse behind the statement 'No woman is free unless she is free to be a lesbian' (Alison, 1995) somehow became the dogma of

slogans such as 'feminism is the theory, lesbianism is the practice'. This might be explained by the lesbian feminist strategy of joining forces with homophobic and often erotophobic heterosexual feminist networks. (Echols, 1984). Lesbianism had to be downplayed as an active sexual possibility, because sexual desire was labelled male-identified. Redefining it as female bonding and resistance to patriarchy, as Rich and others have done, made it palatable to those more comfortable thinking about cultural politics than cunnilingus. At the same time, this resulted in the production of new forms of domination. Echols argued at this point that lesbian feminism shifted from its roots in radical feminism to what she calls 'cultural feminism', as expressed in the writings of women such as Susan Brownmiller, Mary Daly, Janice Raymond and Adrienne Rich. Key elements of cultural feminism are the essentialist gender division described above as well as a collapse of the personal and the political. She argues that radical feminists tended to be careful to maintain a distinction between personal solutions and political ones. They also rejected essentialist constructions of female sexuality, seeing women's sexual conservatism not as a spiritual quality of women but as the effect of sexist socialisation. Cultural feminists tend to look at social change through developing alternative female consciousness in individuals. The solution to patriarchy, in these terms, is for women to exorcise their internalised male consciousness and nurture their 'femaleness'. This focus on individual solutions to political problems led to the conception of 'liberated' behaviour and justified the policing of personal actions.

The lesbian continuum is arguably more of a lesbian hierarchy (e.g. some feminists are more woman-identified than others). By defining certain human characteristics, relationships, gender expressions and sexual practices as either man-identified or woman-identified, cultural feminists claimed authority to judge and police other women, acting, in effect, as an unofficial feminist government. These positions of authority are justified because, as women separate from institutionalised heterosexuality, lesbians have a privileged perspective as outsiders. This perspective is necessary to recognise the extent of male power and to develop a revolutionary consciousness (Frye, 1983). Fortunately for women other than lesbians, they can also develop this consciousness by learning to identify with women instead of men. The Radicalesbians (1970 cited in Rust, 1995: 132) wrote that women can give each other a new sense of self which has 'to develop with reference to ourselves, and not in relation to men'. By identifying with women and escaping from the male-defined representations of women which they have been taught living in a hetero-patriarchy, women can discover their true (essential) nature as women. Women who know themselves, who have freed themselves

from patriarchal false consciousness, can work together to build a feminist movement and overthrow patriarchy. Of course, lesbian women will find the project of 'developing feminist self-knowledge and self-love' (Rust, 1995: 133) easier than their less pure counterparts.

This authority-claim, and the resultant forms of domination, did not go uncontested. Women of colour resisted the demand that gender be recognised as the primary source of oppression, and criticised white, middle-class women who claimed to represent the oppression of all women (e.g., hooks, 1981; Moraga, 1981). Furthermore, women who worked with men to challenge racism resented the efforts of feminist governance to dictate to which struggle they should devote their energies, or indeed that these struggles were separate. Many women felt betrayed by this police state form of feminism.

What drew me to politics was my love of women, that agony I felt in observing the straitjackets of poverty and repression I saw people in my family in. But the deepest political tragedy I've experienced is how with such grace, such blind faith, this commitment to women in the feminist movement grew to be exclusive and reactionary. (Moraga, cited in Allison, 1995:101).

Similarly, lesbian feminist critiques of butch/femme relationships and sexual desire have been criticised as classist. Butch/femme was an integral part of US working-class lesbian bar culture (Davis and Kennedy, 1993; Feinberg, 1993), while lesbian feminist politics were primarily developed by middle-class university educated women.

Failure to recognise inequalities of race and class were not the only sources of discontent among women. Sex-positive feminists, along with working-class and ethnic minority women, contested the authority-claims of lesbian feminism to define feminist politics. The so-called 'feminist sex wars' developed from a radical rejection of cultural feminism's sex policing. Butch/femme, BD/SM (bondage and discipline, domination and subordination, & sadomasochism), pornography, penetrative sex (by penis or dildo), casual sex and sex with men have all been reviled as male-identified forms of sexual practice (Johnston, 1973; Dworkin, 1988; Daly, 1988, 1992). Perhaps the most frequently highlighted event in the American academic history of the feminist sex wars, the Scholar and Feminist IX Conference 'Towards a Politics of Sexuality' held at Barnard College in New York in 1982, provided a forum for the questioning of cultural feminism's authority-claims of sexual correctness. From

this conference came *Pleasure and Danger* (Vance, 1999 [1984]), a collection of papers which defended women's sexual diversity, while, at the same time, acknowledging the dangers involved in sexuality, especially for women.

Probably the most influential sex-positive feminist text, written for this conference, has been Gayle Rubin's (1999 [1984]) 'Thinking Sex: Notes for Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality'. Rubin dissects claims that feminism must be the definitive source for analysis of the politics of sexuality. Instead, she argues that gender and sexuality should be understood as distinct axes of oppression. While arguing that sexuality is not reducible to gender, Rubin does recognise that there are, of course, intersections between the two. 'Because sexuality is a nexus of the relationships between genders, much of the oppression of women is borne by, mediated through, and constituted within, sexuality' (pp 300-301). At the same time, she clearly demonstrates the ways in which sexuality is constructed hierarchically and describes the oppression that results from these hierarchies.

Throughout Western history, Rubin argues, certain sexual behaviours have been harshly punished as sin or crime. Outside religious or legal control, sex is still considered an exceptional category. For example, she argues that while 'people can be intolerant, silly or pushy about what constitutes proper diet, differences in menu rarely provoke the kind of rage, anxiety, and sheer terror that routinely accompany differences in erotic taste ' (p 279). Rubin argues that sexual identities are arranged in a hierarchical system ranging from monogamous married heterosexuality at the top to sex workers, sadomasochists, fetishists and those who desire across generational boundaries at the bottom. Those at the top of the hierarchy are privileged while those at the bottom are stigmatised and punished. Both privileged and stigmatised categories are produced through representation, including of governmental, religious, medical and psychiatric discourse and interventions; privilege can be understood partly in terms of mental health while stigma is associated with psychological dysfunction. Of course, the placement of categories changes over time. Monogamous, long-term, same-sex couples are, in many social contexts, increasingly considered normal and healthy. At the same time, many people fear that shifting the barrier between acceptable and unacceptable sexual activity is the beginning of a slippery slope. This is what Rubin terms 'the domino theory of sexual peril'. This in turn relates to Rubin's final ideological structure: the lack of a concept of benign sexual variation. Rubin argues that it is difficult to work toward a pluralistic sexual ethos when *different* is seen as inherently *bad*. 'Variation is a fundamental property of all life,

from the simplest biological organisms to the most complex human social formations. Yet sexuality is supposed to conform to a single standard ' (p 283).

Central to Rubin's conception of a radical politics of sexuality is the development of new sexual ethics. She argues that 'a democratic morality should judge sexual acts by the way partners treat one another, the level of mutual consideration, the presence or absence of coercion, and the quantity and quality of the pleasures they provide' (p 283). Other aspects of sexual behaviour, she argues, should not be of ethical concern. This sex-positive feminist argument not only allows for a much greater diversity of sexual expression than 'lesbian feminism', it overcomes the limitations of a feminist politics that constructs gender as *the* oppression suffered by women to which there can be a singular response. Gayle Rubin's argument was heavily influenced by Michel Foucault's work, *The History of Sexuality*. In turn, both have been major influences on the development of 'queer theory.'

## **All About Queer**

Queer, in its academic use, can be understood as a shift in theory and other forms of political practice towards the destabilisation of gender and sexual orientation identity categories. The newest label for intersections of poststructuralism and sex-positive feminism, queer criticises identity politics for producing new forms of domination. 'Queer theory', a term generally credited to Teresa de Lauretis (Weigman, 1994), was used in her introduction of a special issue of *differences* to describe the conference from which the articles came. 'The project of the conference was based on the speculative premise that homosexuality is no longer to be seen simply as marginal with regard to a dominant, stable form of sexuality (heterosexuality) against which it would be defined either by opposition or homology' (de Lauretis, 1991: iii). The development of queer is part and parcel of a general questioning of politics based on identity categories including woman (Butler, 1990, 1993; hooks, 1981; Riley, 1988; Spelman, 1988) and black (Gilroy, 2001). This poststructuralist politics of difference also includes a focus on sex/uality.

One of the most important contributions of queer theory, in rejecting identity politics, comes from its sex-positive feminist heritage: a radical sexual ethics. Like the lesbian feminist transformation of lesbianism from sexual to political identity, contemporary mainstream lesbian/gay political organisations tend to talk about identities and equality and avoid much



discussion of sexual acts or desires. Michael Warner (1999) criticises sexual identity politics for focusing on identity to the exclusion of sex. For him, sexual shame is the key issue to be addressed in a politics of sexuality. The political value of queer and public sex cultures is not in their transgressive nature, but in their development of alternative sexual values that attempt to move beyond sexual shame. 'In queer circles... sex is understood to be as various as the people who have it' (p 35). As Rubin (1984) noted, many of the forms of sexual pleasure expressed in these queer circles (e.g. sex in parks or toilets, SM, role playing, making or using pornography, having sex with friends, etc) are perceived to be immoral at best and amoral at worst. Warner further notes that, 'the frank refusal to repudiate sex or the undignified people who have it, which I see as the tacit or explicit ethos in countless scenes of queer culture, is the antithesis of identity politics' (p 75). The value of queer sexual ethics for straight-identified women (and men) is explored in Kath Albury's writing about heterosexuality (2002). Highlighting the connections between the feminist sex wars and queer ethics, Albury argues for the possibility of moving 'from compulsory heterosexuality to ethical hetero-sex' (p 170).

In contrast to cultural feminists, Albury cites ethical BDSM (bondage and discipline, domination and submission, and sadomasochism) as one potential source of inspiration for the queering of heterosexuality and the practice of ethical hetero sex. Feminist critiques of heterosexuality, including those of cultural feminists, rightly point out the problems inherent in the normative conception of hetero-sex as involving of an active male, passive female and linear progression towards vaginal intercourse. BDSM, on other hand, offers a more consensual and participatory approach to sex. Unlike the high level of risks -- of unplanned pregnancy, STIs, regret or insufficient consent -- involved in traditional heterosex, where sex 'just happens' (Holland et al, 1998), BDSM is generally expected to involve advanced negotiation and preagreed signals (i.e., a 'safeword') to indicate slow down or stop (Califia-Rice, 2000, 2002; Miller, 1995; Wiseman, 1998). This participatory approach offers a radical alternative to relationships, sexual or otherwise, in our lives in which we do not feel empowered to negotiate, sexual or otherwise.

Queer and sex-positive feminist accounts of sexuality often emphasise the positive and the pleasurable in defence against right-wing and cultural feminists' attacks on sexual diversity. As in the 1980s sexuality debates, it is important to remember the risks involved in all social relationships, including sexual ones, sadomasochistic or otherwise. What constitutes ethical BDSM, or indeed ethical sex of any sort, is certainly not a straightforward question.

These questions can only be addressed in environments that encourage open communication, critical thought and emotional support. While the rigidity of identity politics, including state-centred lesbian/gay strategies and lesbian feminism, often constrain the possibility of developing such spaces, sex-positive approaches can also become rigid through efforts to defend identity borders. Annie Sprinkle, US sex-positive feminist icon, cautions against this rigidity in an open letter.

I had a lot of fun, gave and received a lot of pleasure, and had a lot of great orgasms, but I have also come to see that I was sometimes quite naive, very immature, and in denial about a lots of things. [...] I now realise that I was often motivated more by a low self-image, the need for money, a desire for power, fear of intimacy, the need for attention, an addiction to intensity, etc. than I was aware of, or cared to admit. As I began to speak out about these realisations to my friends and colleagues, I am often met with resistance. [...] It is so precious to have a place to speak out about, and perform about, our 'mistakes,' doubts, hurts, angers, fears, bullshit and dislikes, and to feel free to be critical about all the stuff we've been so busy defending. How precious to have a place which is so sex positive that we can be 'negative' (Sprinkle, 2001: 79).

Indeed, perhaps it is a recognition of the dangers of rigidity, whether 'gay', 'feminist' or 'sex-positive', that characterises the ideals of queer theory.

Queer is more than a promotion of a radical sexual ethics, significant though this is. Central to the arguments that have come to be called queer theory is a critique of sexual orientation identity politics for reifying the very categories, the rigid division between heterosexuality and homosexuality, that enable relationships of domination. Indeed, this division is not only instrumental in the production of sexual domination, but is integrated into the hierarchical binary logic that underpins the very basis of knowledge, identity, practices and social relations in the overdeveloped world (Seidman, 1997). In an either/or world, queer calls for the inclusion of both/and/neither and any other possibilities people can invent. Rather than promote gay and lesbian identities as resistance to compulsory heterosexuality, queer theory focuses on the disciplinary character of all sexual orientation identities.

Minoritizing epistemological strategies stabilises a power/knowledge regime which defines bodies, desires, behaviours, and social relations in binary terms according to a fixed hetero/homo sexual preference. Such linguistic and discursive binary figures inevitably get framed in hierarchical terms, thus reinforcing a politics of exclusion and domination.

Moreover, in such a regime, sexual politics is pressured to move between two limited options: the liberal struggle to legitimate homosexuality in order to maximise a politics of inclusion and the separatist struggle to assert difference on behalf of a politics of ethnic nationalism (Seidman, 1997: 149).

In these terms, any form of identity politics is a dead end. The hetero/homo division inhibits the open discussion of sexual diversity, both in terms of gendered desire and in acknowledging the extensive range of social factors that shape sexual desire and practice beyond binary gender division (Sedgwick, 1990). Furthermore, a strategic focus on gay and lesbian identity excludes differences based on other social hierarchies (e.g. race, class, gender, etc.), not to mention bisexual and transgender identities which potentially undermine hetero/homo and male/female divisions. Finally, as Seidman points out, this strategy allows for very limited political options. Jeffrey Weeks has argued that sexual politics must always include both a 'moment of citizenship' and a 'moment of transgression' (1995). However, either wanting to be included within the social order (citizenship) or breaking the rules (transgression) reifies the legitimacy of the social order and its rules. Queer theory, on the other hand, seems to argue for the possibility of social order based on difference, with minimal discipline and constraint (Seidman, 1997).

Such a suggestion is highly counterintuitive and unsurprisingly brings lots of questions. What form of political action might bring about such an order? Is the cultural politics of knowledge that is the basis of much queer theory sufficient? Indeed, how could such a social order function? And who would work to bring about such change, if not 'gays and lesbians'? And, finally, if 'gays and lesbians' find value in their identities, which they may imagine to be essential, who are queer theorists to tell them otherwise? While the insights of queer theory are broadly acknowledged among academics researching sexual politics, the possibility of translating these theories into political practice is less frequently accepted.

In an article that exemplifies this debate, Joshua Gamson (1996) argues that queer produces a dilemma: that the logic of both ethnic/essentialist boundary maintenance and queer/deconstructionist boundary destabilisation make sense. Queer, Gamson acknowledges, is important for exposing the limitations of ethnic-style gay and lesbian identity politics through the inherent reinforcement of binary divisions including man/woman and hetero/homo that produce political oppression. But he does not see many pragmatic possibilities for action

in queer theory. 'Deconstructive strategies remain quite deaf and blind to the very concrete and violent institutional forms to which the most logical answer is resistance in and through a particular collective identity' (409). As he notes, Gamson is not the only one to have questioned the necessity of giving up identity politics. Others who question the basis of identity politics have advocated an 'operational essentialism' (Spivak, cited in Butler, 1990) a 'strategic essentialism' (Fuss, 1989) or a recognition that identities are 'necessary fictions' (Weeks 1995). Gamson see the strength of queer politics primarily in the realm of the 'cultural'. 'At the heart of the dilemma is the simultaneity of cultural sources of oppression (which make loosening categories a smart strategy) and institutional sources of oppression (which make tightening categories a smart strategy)' (412-413). He does, however, ask whether it might be possible that deconstructionist approaches could effectively resist regulatory institutions.

Gamson is right to suggest that certain cultural tactics such as kiss-ins and 'Queer Bart [Simpson]' t-shirts do not address violent regulatory institutions including law and medicine. His argument presumes that the organisation of these institutions produces the necessity of identity politics. 'Interest-group politics on the ethnic model is, quite simply but not without contradictory effects, how the American socio-political environment is structured' (409). His argument follows primarily with examples of attempts to utilise State systems through voting blocs, lobbying groups and antidiscrimination laws. Gamson acts as though 'the State' were a solid structure, lying outside of everyday social practice, that determines avenues of resistance. Thus, the biological determinism of essentialist models of sexuality is replaced by a social determinism in structuralist models of society. A poststructuralist position would suggest that the State does not determine politics, but that certain practices (including, but certainly not limited to, voting and lobbying) *produce the State*. At the beginning of *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler (1990), drawing upon Foucault, makes an explicit link between the representational politics of feminism and of government. For feminism, representation of women is both to seek recognition as a political category and to present or produce 'women' as a political category. Likewise, a State claims to represent a set of subjects for their benefit, '[b]ut the subjects regulated by such structures are, by virtue of being subjected to them, formed, defined, and reproduced

in accordance with the requirements of those structures (p2)'. That produces two particular problems for feminism. First, the representation of the category 'women' is always exclusive, resulting in resistance to the domination of these representation claims. Second, if the category 'women' is constituted by a political system, including 'the State', then a politics taking this category as its foundation assists in the continual production of a hierarchical gender division. Rather than seeking emancipation through structures of power, Butler argues that feminism should understand how the category of 'woman' is produced and restrained by these systems. Again, Butler compares the foundationalist claims of feminism (e.g. that 'women' exist prior to social production) to those of liberal democracy. 'The performative invocation of a nonhistorical 'before' becomes the foundational premise that guarantees the presocial ontology of persons who *freely consent* to be governed and, there by, constituted the legitimacy of the social contract' (p3 my emphasis). Returning to Gamson, it cannot be a workable strategy to tighten categories in the face of institutional oppression, if indeed tight categories are the basis and effect of institutional oppression. Questions of queer politics are part of a larger debate on sexuality and citizenship.

## **Debating Citizenship**

Theorists such as Ken Plummer (2003) and Jeffrey Weeks (1995; Weeks et al, 2001) advocate something which is a compromise between the limitations of liberal identity politics and the radical critique of queer theory, and which is compatible with contemporary sexual orientation political activism: a call for 'intimate' or 'sexual citizenship'. They credit queer politics, as a part of the 'moment of transgression,' with challenging the status quo and stretching the boundaries of inclusion. What is ultimately more important in their eyes is the

moment of citizenship: that the claims equal protection of the law, to equal rights in employment, parenting, social status, access to welfare provision, and partnership rights and same-sex marriage. Without the transgressive moment the claims of the hitherto excluded would barely be noticed in apparently rigid and complacent structures of old and deeply entrenched societies. Transgression is necessary in order to face traditional ways of life with their inadequacies, to expose the prejudices and fears. But without the claims to full citizenship, difference can never be fully validated (Weeks, Heaphy and Donovan, 2001:196).

In the language of intimate or sexual citizenship, then, queer transgression is important for shaking up the public sphere and making space for sexual inclusion. This project must then redefine citizenship, altering its traditional masculine and heterosexual character (Richardson, 1998; Walby, 1994) in order to validate gendered and sexualised differences.

Ken Plummer (2003), a strong advocate of changing definitions of citizenship, argues that it can be made more flexible and fluid. Poststructuralist positions that emphasise fragmentation, lack of coherence and difference could invalidate conceptions of citizenship. But, he suggests,

the recognition of a plurality of groups living in the global world where notions of national citizenship are breaking down is surely becoming more common, and thus the poststructuralist approach is likely to be the most fruitful *starting point* for building newer ideas and citizenship, such as the notion of intimate citizenship (p 53).

Plummer also argues that using difference as a starting point for understanding citizenship cannot be taken too far. He cites liberal sociological critic Alan Wolfe, who argues that boundaries between groups are necessary.

Inclusive democracy and exclusive group centredness are necessary for a rich but just social life. Without particular groups with sharply defined boundaries, life in modern society would be unbearable.... Yet if the boundaries between particular groups are too rigid, we would have no general obligations.... We would live together with people exactly like ourselves, unexposed to the challenge of strangers, the lure of cosmopolitanism, and expansion of moral possibility that comes with responsiveness to generalised other (1992:311-12, cited in Plummer, 2003: 55).

This argument assumes that there are groups which can be defined in terms of sameness, that it is possible to have sharply defined boundaries. Such a view, I suggest, would be contested by poststructuralist positions. Plummer, on the other hand, argues that this intersection of poststructuralism and liberalism is not only possible, but productive for theorising an intimate citizenship with flexible boundaries. Indeed, he argues that such citizenship is already developing, with increased public recognition of diversity of sexual identities and practices, family and relationship forms and gendered identities. Like Weeks (1995; Weeks et al, 2001),

Plummer argues for the importance of transgression in order to continuously encourage a more inclusive and flexible conception of citizenship. Thus, they suggest that the concept of citizenship can be reclaimed and radicalised by implementing queer insights.

### Citizenship Transformed?

One of the arguments that underpins the possibility of more inclusive and flexible notions of citizenship is that we live in a time and space characterised by 'postmodern ethics' (Bauman, 1993).

Under the emerging conditions of late modernity, more and more people are now charged with becoming responsible beings in their own right. They have to ask not 'What should I do or not do?' but 'How should I deal with this?' They have to look to a range of competing claims about how to live a good life, rather than simply following preordained patterns. Citizenship becomes a form of identity that stresses self-determination (Plummer, 2003:96).

This argument dovetails nicely with those of Anthony Giddens (1992) who argues that there has been a 'transformation of intimacy' in recent years. According to Giddens, the late 20th century has seen the rise of 'plastic sexuality' separated from the demands of reproduction, and also 'pure relationships' characterised by egalitarian 'confluent love' and complete disclosure. This represents an ideal of democracy in the 'private sphere' which is interconnected with liberal democracy in 'public sphere'. Indeed, he suggests it might even drive further democratisation in a global revolution.

Yet the radicalising possibilities of the transformation of intimacy are very real. Some have claimed that intimacy can be oppressive, and clearly this may be so if it is regarded as a demand for constant emotional closeness. Seen, however, as a transactional negotiation of personal ties by equals, it appears in a completely different light. Intimacy implies a wholesale democratising of the interpersonal domain, in a manner fully compatible with democracy in the public sphere. There are further implications as well. The transformation of intimacy might be a subversive influence upon modern institutions as a whole. For a social world in which emotional fulfilment replaced the maximising of economic growth would be very different from that which we know at present. The changes now affecting sexuality are indeed revolutionary, and in a very profound way (p 3).

Democratisation in the public domain, not only at the level of the nation-

state, supplies essential conditions for the democratising of personal relationships. But the reverse applies also. The advancement of self autonomy in the context of pure relationships is rich with implications for democratic practice and the larger community (p 195).

This revolution in process might be seen in the rise of the self-determining citizen and egalitarian intimate relationships in a world where truth is contested. But, to what extent is that actually happening? Indeed, to what extent can 'public' and 'private' be so neatly divided?

Arguments for the potential of new forms of citizenship in a postmodern era put little emphasis on constraint, suggesting that 'tradition' was perhaps the key constraining factor that is now gone in late (or post) modernity. This lack of constraint is what enables a democratic reading of 'public' and 'private' life. Giddens' notion of the pure relationship might even constrain the possibility of an ethics of care for the other. A 'pure relationship' is defined as a contractual agreement and thus it can be easily broken by either party. '[W]hat holds the pure relationship together,' he argues 'is the acceptance on the part of each partner, "until further notice", that each gains sufficient benefit from the relation to make its continuance worthwhile' (p 63).

Pro-citizenship arguments fail to acknowledge the ways in which contracts are produced in the context of a legalistic framework that constructs individuals in terms of rational independence, and this in itself is constraining. While the arguments that we in the wealthy countries of the world live in a time and space qualitatively different from most of human history, and from our global contemporaries, are established in sociological literature, this assumption is looked at more critically within anthropology. David Graeber (2004), for example, argues that the division between traditional and postmodern societies is a false dichotomy. What are social divisions of race, class, and gender if not kinship systems, a term usually associated with 'primitive' societies. What is a contract if not a tradition?

Such an argument is compatible with Lynn Jamieson's (1999) critique of *The Transformation of Intimacy*. This is most apparent in her historical contextualisation of Giddens' claims to new forms of relationships as part of a long tradition of such claims including examples from 18th-century Scotland. Giddens' further claims that constructions of gender and sexuality are now much more open to negotiation within newly egalitarian relationships are challenged by Jamieson through extensive review of literature on



relationships that suggest the contrary. The traditional definition of sex as penis plus vagina until male ejaculation is far from being consigned to the dustbins of history in many (heterosexual) contexts. Likewise, gender inequalities in heterosexual couples persist according to the empirical work she has mobilised in her critique. Finally, the therapeutic discourse upon which Giddens draws and, arguably, reproduces, is compatible with the individualistic logic of Enlightenment ideals. Such criticisms put into doubt the possibilities of transforming citizenship.

## Sexual Rights

Integral to arguments for sexual citizenship is an advocacy-of-rights discourse as a somewhat problematic but necessary tool for social inclusion. Diane Richardson (2000) has investigated how rights language has been deployed in order to demand change in the realm of sexuality. She categorises demands for sexual rights in terms of sexual practices, identities and relationships. First in terms of sexual practices is of course the right to participate in sexual acts. The claims to such a right have depended upon problematic justifications, including that sexual gratification is an essential need or that the State should not interfere in what people do in their bedrooms (reifying a public/private division). Furthermore, what constitutes an appropriate or 'natural' sexual act has been defined by State apparatuses in terms of sodomy laws, the criminalisation of sadomasochism, and the regulation of sexual practices by people with disabilities. Second, is the right to pleasure. This has been justified again in terms of essentialist constructions of sexuality or through arguments of the citizen as consumer who has the 'right to engage in non-reproductive sexual activities for pleasure' (p 114). Historically, this has been used to justify men's access to women's bodies, including through definitions of 'vaginal orgasms' experienced through penis-vagina intercourse being more 'mature' than those experienced through other forms of sexual practice. Third, is the right to sexual and reproductive self-determination. Particularly evident within feminist politics, these include the right to sex without fear of unwanted pregnancy, sexually transmission infections, or sexual violence or harassment. They also include positive rights of access to contraception and abortion, as well as choice of sexual practices and partners. Identity-based claims, Richardson argues, problematically depend on on a conception of identity as stable and singular from which interests and issues can be determined. They include the rights to self-definition, self-expression and self-realisation. These rights claims

have come from lesbian gay and bisexual campaigning groups attempting to find ways to be included within the public sphere. Finally, Richardson explores sexual rights in terms of relationships. First is the 'right of consent to sexual practice of personal relationships' (p 123), defined in terms of age of consent laws. Second, the right to freely choose sexual partners is a demand to prevent racial or gendered categorisations inhibiting sexual relationships. And last is a right to publicly recognised sexual relationships. Richardson focuses on debates concerning same-sex marriage. Her article demonstrates that claims to sexual rights are problematic, not only because the concept has so many meanings, but also because they so often depend upon justification through theoretically dubious arguments.

The advocacy of intimate or sexual citizenship by Plummer and Weeks depends upon analysis of late modernity as a time of moral renewal, allowing for more flexible and negotiated constructions of citizenship. Challenging this assumption, Carole Smith (2002) argues that the rise in rights talk in late modernity has continued to sequester moral choice and debate from everyday life. Giddens' (1992) claim of the 'pure relationship' as an ethical autonomous space is difficult to sustain in view of relations of governmentality in the realm of intimate relationships. Indeed, relationships are increasingly spoken of in terms of rights, particularly in anticipation of the relationship's end and the inevitable division of property and, possibly, children. Through the language of rights, moral issues are translated 'into ethical codes that are not designed for moral debate but for public consumption' (Smith, 2002:60). In this sense, rights can be seen to serve dual purposes: to both enable political participation for the disfranchised and to disguise systematic inequality while maintaining privilege (Brown, 1995: 99). The myth of the liberal subject, dependent on an a notion of human essence, suggests that we are all equal. Any inequalities that may exist must not then be the product of systematic social relationships, but of individual choices. A demand for rights, then, is to ask to be elevated to the status of a liberal subject.

Focusing on rights as an aim of social movements has the effect of obscuring the wrongs that are entwined with the myth of the liberal subject. Not only do identity politics run the risk of maintaining borders between categories of people; in lobbying for rights, they run the risk of maintaining the walls of the liberal, isolated, rational and individual self.

Thus, if the provision of boundary and protection from 'bodily and spiritual intrusion' offered by rights are what historically subjugated

peoples most need, rights may also be one of the cruellest social objects of desire dangled above those who lack them. In the very same gesture with which they draw a circle around the individual, in the very same act with which they grant her sovereign selfhood, they turn back upon the individual all responsibility for her failures, her condition, her poverty, her madness -- they privatise her situation and mystify the powers that construct, position, and buffet her (Brown, 1995: 128).

Plummer (2003) argues that this individualism is not necessary to the concept of rights. He suggests, rather, the value of thinking in terms of 'group rights' and of a 'multicultural citizenship' (Kymlicka, 1997). How this might work in terms of individualistic legal frameworks, however, is unclear. Furthermore, it fails to response to the question of how some 'groups' continue to be 'socially excluded, inferiorised, marginalised, or otherwise severely disadvantaged '(Plummer, 2003:136).

Importantly, feminist scholars have argued that the language of rights emphasises masculine values of individualism, rationalism and formality, inhibiting capacity for moral expression in terms of an ethic of care (Gilligan, 1982; Porter, 1999). Indeed, as Bentham (1962, cited in Smith, 2002) has argued, rights only have meaning if enforced by law; in other words, rights depend upon the coercive threat of punishment by the State apparatus, a masculine institution (Ferguson, 1984; Brown, 1995). Rights enforced by the State are dependent upon national citizenship, also frequently, if not always, based upon a masculine and heterosexual standard (Richardson, 1998).

The impartiality of rights is not only masculine in nature, but depends upon a myth of ahistorical, acultural and acontextual status. In this way, they return to notions of timeless universalism rather than the empathy and flexibility upon which ethics might be understood to depend (Bauman, 1993). This universalism contradicts the social constructionist arguments put forth by advocates of citizenship such as Weeks and Plummer. Wendy Brown poses the rhetorical question,

If contemporary rights claims are deployed to protect historically and contextually contingent identities, might the relationship of the universal idiom of rights to the contingency of the protected identities be such that the former operates inadvertently to resubordinate by renaturalising that which it was intended to emancipate by articulating? (1995:99)

Plummer (2003) suggests that rights may indeed represent universal values of tolerance and mercy, as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was written including representatives from a variety of religions and cultures. Regardless of whether or not these values are indeed universal, the notion of expressing these values in terms of rights is a historically specific construction. Furthermore, this fails to recognise the ways in which the category of 'human' is socially constructed and historically contingent. As Diane Richardson (1998) points out, this construction often includes gendered and sexualised (along with racialised and classed) elements. Human rights provide little protection as long as some humans are constructed as more equal than others. As rights are ultimately defined by the State, we also need to be wary of how the State apparatus constructs 'human'. A recent history of violations of human rights by the British State suggests that this State constructs some humans as people and others as 'unpeople' (Curtis, 2004). The ongoing war/occupation in Iraq is an obvious contemporary example of the Third World genocide upon which privilege in the UK and other G8 countries depends (Jensen, 2005).

Finally, the notion of rights comes attached to a presumption of a constant potential for violation. From where might this violation come? And to whom are we looking for protection? Brown argues that the answers these questions may be very similar.

Whether one is dealing with the state, the Mafia, parents, pimps, police, or husbands, the heavy price of institutionalised protection is always a measure of dependence and agreement to abide by the protector's rules. As Rousseau's elegant critique of 'civil slavery' made so clear, institutionalised political protection necessarily entails surrounding individual and collective power to legislate and adjudicate for ourselves in exchange for external guarantees of physical security, including security in one's property. Indeed, within liberalism, paternalism and institutionalised protection are interdependent rights of the heritage of social contract theory, as 'natural liberty' is exchanged for the individual and collective security ostensibly guaranteed by the state (p 169).

She suggests that State-centred feminist politics are problematic for a number of reasons. First, the State is characterised by features that 'signify, enact, sustain, and represent masculine power as a form of dominance' (p 167). Second, women have particular cause to be concerned about a politics of protection. Traditionally, claims of women's frailty and need for protection by some men from others have been used to justify various forms of exclusions and

inequalities. Third, citing the work of Foucault, Weber and Marcuse, State-centred politics also involve a politics of regulation. Each of these reasons provides cause for concern for any politics of sexual freedom.

If we take seriously Foucault's analysis that the individual does not preexist relations of power, but is constituted through them, then we should question the effects that rights discourses have on the development of individuals' understandings of themselves and consequently their relationships with others. If these critiques of rights claims are accurate, the risk of rights discourses is the construction of the individual as disengaged from moral debate and in constant need of protection, while at the same time individually responsible for their own experiences of oppression.

### State-centred sexual politics

The plausibility of intimate citizenship as a compromise between identity politics and queer theory and activism is not simply a theoretical question. Various activist groups in the UK and elsewhere have attempted to utilise citizenship strategies to achieve social justice. The relationship between the politics of sexuality and the State has been severely under-explored (Cooper, 2002). It is not my aim here to take on this task with a comprehensive analysis of State-centred sexual orientation activism. Nor do I offer a 'balanced' account of the potential of State-centred activism to achieve equality. Rather, I conclude this section on citizenship debates with three examples that cast doubt on Weeks' and Plummer's optimism about the possibilities of intimate citizenship and encouraged me to look elsewhere for inspiration for a radical sexual politics.

I begin with a 'personal' example. One victory claimed by gay/lesbian campaigning organisations in the UK is the recognition of same-sex partnerships in immigration law and, arguably, a move towards equalising heterosexuality and homosexuality. While my life has been made easier than it would have been if I had been unable to obtain residency here and thus maintain my relationship, the process which I had to undergo to request recognition of my relationship involved numerous inequalities. First of all, I had to find ways to remain in the country legally for an initial two-year period before the Immigration Office – one disciplinary apparatus of the State – would begin to consider my claim of partnership. I was able to do this only because my partner's salary was sufficient to support both of us during this period while

I was unable to work legally, and because my privileged levels of education allowed me to register for a postgraduate degree in the UK. Because my justification for remaining in the UK during this initial two year period each had a limited timespan (three-month work permit, three-month tourist stamp, six-month prospective student stamp, and one year student stamp) I regularly had to travel to the immigration office at Glasgow airport where I handed over the application forms and my passport to someone who had the power to reject my application to maintain my chosen home. On one particularly painful trip to the immigration office, all applicants were forced to wait outside because there were apparently insufficient staff for us to be allowed inside the building. The indignity of waiting outside was bad enough, but it was also snowing and many of the people, including small children, were insufficiently dressed for the weather. This was a radically disempowering and dehumanising set of experiences. So was sending off a package to the Home Office containing photographs, postcards, 12 letters of support indicating that our relationship was 'akin to marriage' (obtained from as many people in high positions, such as professors, as possible), evidence of our shared abode and economic entanglement, and narratives produced by me and my partner including how we would feel if we were forced apart. For many months we waited for authorities' response to our plea. After numerous experiences of subordination, my application was accepted. Not only does a claim of legal equality in terms of immigration law obscure the numerous inequalities exemplified through my own personal case, in particular inequalities of class, race, nationality, education and the division between bureaucrats and others, it is not in fact an equality - married heterosexual couples do not face the same delays to recognition - but most importantly it fails to question the initial source of inequality. There is a great irony in praising the State for granting individuals the rights to cross the border, when the ongoing production of State and border are inseparable. Borders are incompatible with substantive equality. The numerous inequalities involved in this victory for 'intimate citizenship' suggests that State-centred efforts to achieve diversity and equality suffer severe limitations.

Matthew Waites' (2003) recent work on the debate surrounding the sexual age of consent in the UK further illustrates the inequalities and borders inherent in the approach of gay and lesbian lobby groups. The belief that legal reform must be a central focus of social change clearly demonstrates the centralised conception of power held by groups that claim to promote 'equality'. This is further emphasised by the vanguardist position taken by Stonewall who claim to represent interests of the gay and lesbian community. This campaign encouraged supporters to draw upon established discourses in order to win the support of individuals

within established institutions (i.e. politicians). In particular, biological and psychological medical discourses on the fixity of sexual orientation, particularly by the age of 16, were utilised by Stonewall as well as by health policy interest groups including the British Medical Association. These discourses were a reactive defence against heterosexist fears of homosexual contagion. Rather than addressing this underlying problem, campaigners accepted these terms and colluded with a 'logic of containment' (p 651). Thus, this strategic approach is active in the continual construction of a border between heterosexuality and homosexuality, which has two key consequences. It denies the possibilities of bisexuality, queerness and other experiences that cannot be contained within this binary. It also encourages us to ignore the concrete ways in which heterosexism damages people of all ages regardless of sexual identity or desires. At the same time, this approach supports the continual construction of a second border, between adults and children. This illustrates how a statist approach, through its emphasis on legislative equality, fails to recognise the complex and intersecting relationships of power that produce diversity, both within the realm of sexual desires, experiences and identities as well as experiences of domination, oppression and exclusion. Furthermore, this binary production of 16 as a dividing line between childhood and adulthood seems to have had further repercussions in supporting the government's current plans to criminalise all sexual behaviour (including sexual touching) involving two or more people where at least one of them is below the age of consent (fpa, 2003; UK Parliament, 2004). Government rhetoric of protecting children in order to justify this legislation depends upon a clearly marked boundary where childhood ends. By failing to understand the nature of power and the continuous production of 'structure', the ethics of the statist approach are deeply problematic. In fact lobbying the elite members of the State apparatus, which necessitates working within established discourses, ultimately results in the continued production of hierarchical social divisions and thus multiple forms of domination, oppression and exclusion. This fact is hidden by the short-term reformist agenda of the State-centred campaigning organisation. They are able to claim a victory for equality. In statist terms, the ends -- legal reform and the spectacle of equality -- justify the means -- discourses of fixed sexuality and claims to authority and representation.

Finally, Davina Cooper's (1994) research on lesbian and gay activist attempts to utilise local government to achieve equality in the 1980s shows that these efforts were largely frustrated. Indeed, she summarises the problem as 'the paradox of a hierarchy 'imposing' equality' (p 173). The organisation and remit of local government was such that it was nearly

impossible to mobilise any form of action within it that fell outwith certain boundaries.

It is clear that certain approaches to sexuality were deemed inappropriate for local government. On some occasions this was a conscious process, whereby activists, councillors and officers chose not to articulate politics that they purposefully advocated in a non-state setting, such as, within a community organisation. At other times, ideas seem so outrageous to municipal politics that they were not even thought within *that* context (p 148).

Although lesbian and gay policies were targeted by the corporate media as examples of the 'loony left', Cooper argues that these were entirely compatible with broadly liberal paradigms. Any practices or discourses which challenged dominant constructions of gender and sexuality were systematically excluded from policy debates.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has described three debates about 'difference' in the politics of sexual orientation. Each can be understood in terms of argument about how far to take the logic of difference. Lesbian feminism largely promoted a singular difference in emphasising gender division as the most fundamental oppression. Working-class women, women of colour and women who enjoyed sexual pleasures outwith those defined by some as 'feminist' challenged this emphasis and argued for a recognition of multiple differences along lines of class, race, gender and sexuality. Queer theory, inspired by poststructuralist philosophy, largely advocates an even more radical politics of difference, challenging any notions of unity. Critics asked how this can be put into political practice: is it not necessary to have some degree of unity? Thus, advocates of intimate citizenship attempt to develop a compromise between a radical promotion of difference and a recognition of the constructed nature of identity with a more sophisticated liberal paradigm of human rights. Poststructuralist critics respond that such a compromise results in the ongoing (re)production of relationships of domination rather than the egalitarian ideal advocates of citizenship promote.

My aim in this chapter has not been to provide a comprehensive overview of the politics of sexuality, but to explore my discomforts with identity politics and to search for inspiration for alternatives. Lesbian feminism was very valuable for providing an analysis of relationship between 'sexual orientation' and macro level forms of social organisation. Rather



than seeing 'sexual orientation' as an individual trait, 'compulsory heterosexuality' was recognised as integral to other relationships of domination. Meanwhile, sex-positive critics of lesbian purity highlighted the significance of sexuality as a realm of oppression in its own right, not entirely definable in terms of gender. Queer theory and activism has developed and expanded on each of these points. Finally, while the potential of queer in achieving radical social change is unclear to many, intimate citizenship, I suggest, provides an unsatisfactory alternative. To fulfill its radical potential, it is necessary to find ways of supporting and encouraging difference without falling into some form of competitive individualism. One political tradition emphasises both individual freedom and cooperative social organisation without the limitations I have suggested are inherent in intimate citizenship. Rarely acknowledged in academic work, in terms of the politics of sexuality or elsewhere, I turn now for inspiration to anarchism.



## Chapter Three

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# Anarchism, Poststructuralism and the Politics of Sexuality: 'Sexual Orientation' as State-Form

*Every daring attempt to make a great change in existing conditions, every lofty vision of new possibilities for the human race, has been labeled Utopian.*

-- Emma Goldman, *Socialism: Caught in the Political Trap*

*The political, ethical, social, philosophical problem of our days is not to try to liberate the individual from the state . . . but to liberate us both from the state and from the type of individualisation which is linked to the state.*

-- Michel Foucault, *The Subject and Power*

Anarchism is a broad label incorporating a diverse range of political theory and practice. These diverse traditions share in common is a belief that it is both possible and desirable to live without rulers, authority or other relationships of domination. The word 'anarchy', popularly used to describe chaotic situations, is derived from the Greek *anarkhia*, meaning 'without authority'. Often seen as a political and ethical philosophy that advances ideas of human nature, anarchism can also be understood as a theory of organisation that offers alternatives to bureaucratic and capitalist standards (Ward, 1982). Anarchist historian Rudolph Rocker suggests that anarchism should be understood as a 'definite trend in the historic development of mankind' to strive for freedom (cited in Chomsky, 1970). Commenting on this, Noam Chomsky argues it is impossible to pin down anarchism as a singular object.

One might ask what value there is in studying a 'definite trend in the historic development of mankind' that does not articulate a specific and detailed social theory. Indeed, many commentators dismiss anarchism as utopian, formless, primitive, or otherwise incompatible with the realities of

a complex society. One might, however, argue rather differently: that at every stage of history our concern must be to dismantle those forms of authority and oppression that survive from an era when they might have been justified in terms of the need for security or survival or economic development, but that now contribute to -- rather than alleviate -- material and cultural deficit. If so, there will be no doctrine of social change fixed for the present and future, nor even, necessarily, a specific and unchanging concept of the goals towards which social change should tend. Surely our understanding of the nature of man or of the range of viable social forms is so rudimentary that any far-reaching doctrine must be treated with great skepticism, just as skepticism is in order when we hear that 'human nature' or 'the demands of efficiency' or 'the complexity of modern life' requires this or that form of oppression and autocratic rule (1970).

Defining anarchism in terms of practical organising that is contingent on historical circumstances avoids reducing it to the writings of dead theorists such as Peter Kropotkin, Michael Bakunin and Pierre-Joseph Proudhon. Furthermore, such definitions challenge the common critique that anarchism is impractical. Colin Ward goes one step further than Rocker and Chomsky:

How would you feel if you discovered that the society in which you would really like to live was already here, apart from a few little, local difficulties like exploitation, war, dictatorship and starvation? The argument of this book is that an anarchist society, a society which organises itself without authority, is always in existence, like a seed beneath the snow, buried under the weight of the state and its bureaucracy, capitalism and its waste, privilege and its injustices, nationalism and its suicidal loyalties, religious differences and their superstitious separatism (1982:14).

For Ward (1982, 2004), anarchism is a living philosophy upon which social life depends. Indeed, the common characteristics of anarchist politics -- mutual aid, free association, and direct democracy -- are lessons learned from studying everyday life. While some argue non-hierarchical large-scale social organisation is impossible, even when documenting the negative health impacts of hierarchy, (Marmot, 2004) I argue that social life could not exist without people helping each other, even if that mutual aid might simultaneously result in the oppression of others (e.g., old boy networks). Life without mutual aid would be the war of all against all described by Hobbes. Even under the most authoritarian regimes of twentieth-century Europe, people co-operated to resist authority.

Anarchism can be understood as an effort to identify, support and encourage

encourage libertarian practices concomitant with hierarchical capitalist society. As anarchist sociologist Paul Goodman writes, 'a free society cannot be the substitution of a 'new order' for the old order; it is the extension of spheres of free action until they make up most of social life' (cited in Ward, 1982:14). Such efforts have obvious implications for the politics of sexuality, though such a connection is rarely made in academic writing on the subject. Anarchist history includes a number of influential theorists who advocated 'sexual liberation' as a crucial aspect of human liberation, including Edward Carpenter, Herbert Marcuse, Wilhelm Reich, A.S. Neil, Charles Fournier and Emma Goldman (Haaland, 1993). While the liberationist perspective of sexuality as a natural force to be set free enabling the possibility of unconstrained human nature is problematic in light of constructionist and poststructuralist theories, the influence of anarchism on the politics of sexuality is rarely acknowledged. Emma Goldman, an anarcho-feminist in the early 20th-century American anarchist milieu spoke positively about homosexuality and was also active in campaigns for women's reproductive freedom. On the subject she wrote, 'To me anarchism was not a mere theory for a distant future; it was a living influence to free us from inhibitions, internal no less than external, and from the destructive barriers that separate man from man [sic]' (1988 [1931]: 556). She was also very active in campaigns for women's reproductive freedom. More recently, Alex Comfort is much better known for *The Joy of Sex* than for his anarchist politics, though these were not separate interests. His first book on sexuality was based on a series of lectures given at the London Anarchist Group in the late 1940s and was published by Freedom Press in 1948 -- a time in British history when no mainstream publisher would consider such a work (Ward, 2004). He made the connection between anarchist politics and sexuality more explicit in his (1973) *More Joy: A Lovemaking Companion to the Joy of Sex*:

acquiring the awareness and the attitudes which can come from good sexual experience does not make for selfish withdrawal: it is more inclined to radicalise people. The anti-sexualism of authoritarian societies and the people who run them does not spring from conviction (they themselves have sex), but from the vague perception that freedom here might lead to a liking for freedom elsewhere. (cited in Ward, 2004:72).

Indeed, fears of 'sexual anarchy' have often been used to justify the existence of authoritarian organisation. As Judy Greenway wrote, 'Critics of anarchism have always claimed that anarchism would mean sexual licence, the absence of restraint, shameless women and irresponsible men indulging every passing lust. In such images, which mingle fascination and disgust, sexual order and political order are tied (or handcuffed) together' (1997:171). So it is

not surprising that queer activism and theory, often seen to promote 'sexual anarchy', have also contributed to the anarchist tradition of sexual politics.

## Queer Anarchy

Contemporary queer political traditions have had three major influences: poststructuralist theory, feminism, and the direct action activism of groups such as ACT UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power). Each of these, in turn, can be understood as part of the anarchist tradition. For now, I focus on queer and feminist activism and return to poststructuralist theory below. The connections between anarchism and feminism are diverse and variable as are each of these traditions. Much of liberal feminism, for example, offers criticisms of neither State nor capitalist forms of organisation (e.g., Friedan, 1974). Likewise, some Marxist<sup>1</sup> feminists see value in seizing the State (e.g., Ebert, 1995; MacKinnon, 1989). At the same time, radical feminist politics, including lesbian feminism, have often been critical of all relationships of domination. For many radical and lesbian feminisms, male domination of women, and thus compulsory heterosexuality, is rejected as inherently authoritarian, and providing a model for all forms of domination (e.g., French, 1985; Rich, 1993). Unfortunately, radical and lesbian feminist claims to privileged subject positions result in vanguardism and relationships of domination (discussed in the Chapter Two), which consistent forms of anarchism seek to avoid. Peggy Kornegger (2002) has made explicit the connection between US second wave feminist organisation and anarchist politics.

In rebellion against the competitive power games, impersonal hierarchy, and mass organisation tactics of male politics, women broke off into small, leaderless, consciousness-raising groups, which dealt with personal issues in our daily lives. Face-to-face, we attempted to get at the root cause of our oppression by sharing our hitherto unvalued perceptions and experiences. We learned from each other that politics is not 'out there' but in our minds and bodies and between individuals. [...] the structure of women's groups bore a striking resemblance to that of anarchist affinity groups within anarcho-syndicalist unions in Spain, France, and many other countries. Yet, we had not called ourselves anarchists and consciously organised around anarchist principles (p27).

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1 Despite the popular association of Marxism with Leninist tactics, Marx's writings included libertarian elements inspiring traditions which share much in common with anarchist politics, including a radical critique of seizing the state (e.g., Cleaver, 2000; Hardt and Negri, 2001, 2005), though some argue that even these retain key problematic features of Marxism (e.g., Day, 2005).

Unfortunately, the anarchist influence has been lost in many feminist groups. Radical lesbian collectives seeking funding offered by the Greater London Council in the 1980s, for example, found their politics and organisational structure incompatible with that of the council bureaucracy. This more often led to changes in collectives, including the development of hierarchies, rather than any changes to local government (Green, 1997). More generally, consciousness-raising groups seem to have largely given way to the post-feminism of 'girl power'. Yet anarchic feminism is not consigned to the dustbins of history, despite the visible dominance of liberal (feminist) politics. Feminist groups often choose anarchist forms of organisation as being more compatible with feminist politics than the masculine characteristics of bureaucracy. The 1980s saw the very visible anarchist feminism of Greenham Common women's peace camp (Roseneil, 1995, 2000). On a smaller scale, many feminist institutions, including women's shelters and libraries, are collectively organised, rejecting hierarchy (Byington et al, 1991; Charles, 2000; Collins et al, 1989; Matthews, 1994; Reinelt, 1994; Stedward, 1987). Women's collectives are still discussing the personal and political and organising events (see e.g., Poldervaart, 2003; The Cailleach Collective, 2004). Anarchic feminism is also an active force in the contemporary global anti-capitalist movement (see e.g., PGA women, 2002).

Anarchism can also be found within 'queer' activism. ACT UP, cited by queer theorists as an inspiration (e.g., Butler, 1993 and Halberstam, 1993), uses anarchist forms of organisation and political tactics. ACT UP is a network of non-hierarchical autonomous groups practising direct action and civil disobedience. Actions are organised not by a centralised command structure, but through self-organising 'affinity groups'.

Affinity groups are self-sufficient support systems of about 5 to 15 people. A number of affinity groups may work together toward a common goal in a large action, or one affinity group might conceive of and carry out an action on its own. Sometimes, affinity groups remain together over a long period of time, existing as political support and/or study groups, and only occasionally participating in actions. [...] Affinity groups form the basic decision-making bodies of mass actions. As long as they remain within the nonviolence guidelines, affinity groups are generally encouraged to develop any form of participation they choose (ACT UP/NY, 2004).

Decisions within affinity groups and larger regional networks are made through consensus, a non-hierarchical form of decision-making process. Through an emphasis on civil disobedience, ACT UP explicitly criticises the legitimacy of the prison and 'justice' systems as helping to

maintain relationships of domination. Finally, ACT UP emphasises the importance of solidarity, especially with those imprisoned by the State apparatus. Again, despite the much higher visibility of the pink pound and LG(BT) lobbying groups, queer anarchist activism continues. The 1980s and 90s saw queer anarchist zines including AQUA (Anarcha Queers Undermining Authority) (Dye, 1989) in the US and the Passion Brigade (date unknown) in the UK. Also in the UK, HOMOCULT (1992) combined an aggressive sexualised class analysis and transgressive language (e.g., 'common queer nigger bitch' and 'shitstabbers'), with a radical critique of more mainstream sexual activist groups in a creative collection of direct propaganda: flyposters, stickers and graffiti. They argued against identity-based lobbying groups: 'We say fuck minority politics. The only minority we see are the pathetic rich who try to control us. HOMOCULT have set about its ultimate plan -- the destruction of the "moral" state' (p1). And, concerning the direct action group Outrage, they write, 'Outrage is a cosy sham. You can only be outraged by what surprises you. It's no surprise to common queers that there is no justice for us. We are not outraged --we are defiant' (p 4). Angry at a politics that emphasise sexual orientation oppression in isolation from other forms of hierarchy, especially capitalism, activists have organised alternatives. Gay Shame, founded in San Francisco and spreading, and La Di Dah (not Mardis Gras) in London mock the profiteering and power games of mainstream lesbian and gay politics.

GAY SHAME is a virus in the system. We are committed to a queer extravaganza that brings direct action to astounding levels of theatricality. We will not be satisfied with a commercialized gay identity that denies the intrinsic links between queer struggle and challenging power. We seek nothing less than a new queer activism that foregrounds race, class, gender and sexuality, to counter the self-serving 'values' of gay consumerism and the increasingly hypocritical left. We are dedicated to fighting the rabid assimilationist monster with a devastating mobilization of queer brilliance. Gay Shame is a celebration of resistance: all are welcome (Gay Shame, 2004).

Some of the activists involved in organising La Di Dah also began a new tradition of queer D.I.Y. (self-organised) autonomous spaces called Queeruption. Welcoming 'queers of all sexualities', Queeruptions have been held in London (1998, 2002), New York (1999), San Francisco (2001), Berlin (2003), Amsterdam (2004), next year in Sydney and Barcelona. Although each is initially organised by a collective, the division between 'organisers' and 'participants' is broken down as much as possible during the event, with everything from



communal vegan cooking and running workshops to cleaning up and skipping food (i.e., retrieving edible food past its 'sell by date' from skips) done by self-organising volunteers. Furthermore, in a rejection of capitalist claims of property ownership and an effort to make events as low-cost as possible, events are held in squatted buildings (Queeruption, 2004). Queer anarchist action is not limited to Europe, North America and Australia/New Zealand. British anarcho-queer spoof paper, *The Pink Pauper*, reports other examples (Anonymous, 2004). In Israel, Black Laundry challenges the leftist status quo which argues that the occupation is the primary political issue, and challenges all forms of hierarchy. In Buenos Aires, an anti-capitalist radical queer group have created a social centre and support a variety of non-hierarchical events. Mujeres Creando ('Women Creating'), an anarcho-feminist group in Bolivia, includes challenging homophobia as a crucial part of its revolutionary politics. These examples, from ACT UP to Mujeres Creando, demonstrate an ongoing, though not inherent, relationship between anarchism and queer politics.

### Criticisms of Queer

While anarchism must necessarily challenge hierarchies of gender and sexuality in order to be consistent with a critique of all forms of domination, 'queer' need not necessarily be anarchist (see Brown, 1996). Queer politics have been criticised on numerous fronts and their congruence with anarchist ideals has been challenged. Firstly, queer politics have been criticised, especially by Marxist and materialist feminists (see e.g., Ebert, 1995, 1996; Glick, 2000; Hennessy, 2000; Jackson, 2001), for promoting individualistic sexual transgression that is consistent with capitalism. Secondly, queer theory has been charged with monopolising sexuality as its domain of study and thus neglecting feminist theories of sexuality and displacing the importance of gender. Thirdly, queer politics can maintain a degree of homocentrism if built around the lesbian and gay identities it had sought to deconstruct. And finally, queer stands accused of romanticising textual deconstruction and a cultural politics of knowledge to the neglect of institutional (Seidman, 1997) and material engagement (Ebert, 1995, 1996; Glick, 2000; Hennessy, 2000). While these criticisms are of course intertwined, I look at each in turn.

### Queer Transgressions

Queer theory and politics are often seen as promoting transgressive practices,

particularly 'queer' sexual practices, rather than addressing systematic inequalities. Strategies focused on transgression may ultimately reinforce the rule that they attempt to disrupt. As Wilson argues, 'just as the only true blasphemer is the individual who really believes in God, so transgression depends on, and may even reinforce, conventional understandings of what it is that is to be transgressed' (1993: 109). As I have argued earlier, neither citizenship nor transgression offers a basis for the production of a radically different social order as both depend on an acknowledgement of the legitimacy of dominant contemporary order(s). Elisa Glick criticises sex-positive feminist and queer theories for encouraging us 'to fuck our way to freedom' (p 19). She suggests that influential writers such as Gayle Rubin and Judith Butler valorise transgressive sexual practices as performative 'subversive repetitions' that challenge discursive productions of normal. Sadomasochism, drag and butch/femme, Glick argues, are promoted as a form of sexual vanguardism. In addition to the problems of promoting particular sexual practices as revolutionary, each of these is taken out of its economic context. Queer constructions of butch/femme as a performative critique of heterogender rarely acknowledge the working-class and racialised historical constructions of these identities and their perceived essential nature. Likewise, sadomasochism, particularly in the form of sex work, is produced within a capitalist context. Finally, camp and drag arguably embody particular racialised and classed constructions of gender (hooks, 1992). To what extent does individual play with power or gender challenge the dominant organisation of either? Indeed, as Glick asks, 'how do sexually dissident styles reproduce relationships of domination' (p 28)? Perhaps queer politics share more with the right-wing libertarianism of *Playboy* than with an anti-capitalist analysis. Similarly, Teresa Ebert (1995) advocates a red feminism in response to 'ludic feminists' such as Judith Butler whose discursive politics, she argues, neglect the material. While Ebert considers the theories of Butler, Foucault, and others to be anarchist, her understanding of anarchism as compatible with capitalism is grounded in the definition of US right-wing academics who defend the 'libertarian' individualism of the 'free' market (e.g., Friedman, 1975; Nozick, 1974; Rothbard, 1978) rather than the libertarian socialist tradition of anarchism described above.

The post-al [sic] politics being put forth by Lyotard, Cornell and other ludic theorists and feminists, such as Judith Butler, is basically an anarchic notion of politics. Its primary goal is individual freedom from *authority* rather than emancipation from socio-economic *exploitation*. [...] Liberation is seen as freedom from authority, from regulation, from any

constraints on the free play of the possibilities of (sexual) differences. [...] Such a post-al freedom (post-authority, post-state, post-class, post-production) is disturbingly close to the demands (desires) of the 'new' aggressive entrepreneurial anarchism of late capitalism that is so evident in the backlash against health care reform and affirmative action in the U.S. and the increasing strength of right-wing politics and racism both in the U.S. and in Europe. This entrepreneurial anarchism is passionately, even violently, committed to a completely unfettered freedom for the individual to pursue profit unconstrained by the state and any obligation to the social good. [...] The post-al politics of [...] ludic feminists, is quite unable to challenge the effects of entrepreneurial anarchism. Instead, the *effects* of ludic claims for the unrestricted play of (sexual) differences, for the unrestricted freedom of individual desires, reinforce this aggressive individualism. There is very little difference -- in their effects -- between ethical feminists and free market entrepreneurs in late capitalism (Ebert, 1995).

Although I contend that Ebert and Glick misread Butler, Rubin and Foucault, the fact that such a reading is possible suggests that queer theory has not adequately elaborated the relationships between sexuality and capitalism. Indeed, as Rosemary Hennessy (2000) argues, recognising the ways in which capitalist social relations are instrumental in the production of identity categories is not to replace a politics of sexuality with politics of class, but to extend 'queer politics to queer-y feelings between sexual identity and exploitation' (p 68). Politics reliant on transgression provide fuel for commodification. As queer zine writer Craig Willse (2004) argues, it is important to recognise the specificity of cultural transgressions rather than applying a blanket class analysis. Criticising Thomas Frank, coeditor of *Commodify Your Dissent*, Willse writes:

Frank writes of these critics as if they are generic scholarly bodies, and he ignores the fact that they are in particular working in feminism and queer theory. By ignoring this, he does not have to grapple with the fact that most feminists and queers are terribly starved for subversive images which betray the structures of gender and sex that we all collide with every day. Rather than simply dismissing this critical writing, it is perhaps more useful to ask: how might queer/feminist people produce radical versions of gender and sex that also challenge the capitalist marketplace? How do we make change when sometimes it feels like our only hope for revolution is, in fact, the television?

Clearly, recognising the inseparability of hierarchies is necessary for queer politics to develop its anarchist heritage.

## Queer Gender

As I argued in the previous chapter, the feminist sex wars led to a division between authoritarian forms of cultural feminism and sex-positive feminism. It was the latter that provided an important grounding for the development of queer theory. For example, Gayle Rubin has influentially argued that feminism is not necessarily the most appropriate framework for understanding sexuality, which should be understood as constituting an axis of oppression not reducible to gender. Rubin's argument was in direct response to the development of a feminist framework constructing women as victims in need of State protection from masculine sexuality (MacKinnon, 1989). In opposing this particular analysis, Rubin was not contending feminism should limit itself to commenting on gender or consider the analysis of sexuality the exclusive preserve of gay, lesbian and queer studies. As Judith Butler argues, 'if sexual relations cannot be reduced to gender positions, which seems true enough, it does not follow that an analysis of sexual relations apart from an analysis of gender relations is possible' (1994:9). This move on the part of gay and lesbian studies or queer theory as a new academic interdisciplinary realm, Butler suggests, is a dangerous effect of the 'conservative force of institutionalization' that must necessarily be criticised 'in the rush to acquiring new legitimacy' (p 21). Indeed, she argues, the same practices that attempt to fix feminism as the old and queer as the new could result in the 'institutional domestication of queer thinking' which would be 'its sad finish' (p 21). Rather, recognising the complexity of oppression requires a rejection of proper objects of study.

[B]oth feminist and queer studies need to move beyond and against those methodological demands which force separations in the interests of canonisation and provisional institutional legitimation. For the analysis of racialisation and class is at least equally important in the thinking of sexuality as either gender or homosexuality, and these last two are not separable from more complex and complicitous formations of power (Butler, 1994:21).

Crossing institutional boundaries and refusing to claim a proper object of study has been a strength much queer theory. Intersections of queer and feminist thought have provided an antinormalist gender critique and have moved beyond binary divisions of man/woman, gender/sex and mind/body. Queer feminists, among others, have challenged the category of 'woman' as a basis for political activism. Returning to criticism of transgression, queer theory potentially produces its own forms of normalisation and hierarchy.

Feminist identifications have, at times, intended to enjoin women to be alike by being visibly different from conventional norms of femininity, in the direction of gender neutrality or nonspecificity, which is also, of course, gendered. Queer emphases on antinormative display enjoin us to be different from conventional norms of femininity by defiantly cross-identifying. Conceptually, then, as well as politically, something called femininity becomes the tacit background in relation to which other positions become figural and mobile (Martin, 1994:119).

Like Butler, Biddy Martin is concerned by a queer theory which represents itself as fluid, open and radical in contrast to a feminism (and female body) which is constraining and ultimately conservative. This simultaneously makes sexuality, as the object of queer theory, as 'the means of crossing, and to make gender and race into grounds so indicatively fixed that masculine positions become the emblem again of mobility' (p 110). The academic claim to sexuality as queer territory, criticised by Butler and Martin, which results in the development of hierarchies -- of politics and knowledge (queer over feminist), gender (transgressive over conventional and masculine over feminine), and oppressions with potential for destabilisation (sexuality over gender and race) -- is incompatible with anarchist politics.

## Queer Homocentrism

Queer theory and politics developed through criticising of the limitations of gay and lesbian identity politics. Whether through identification with or against gay and lesbian, queer is constructed around homosexuality. Thus, queer is something of a contradictory project. Eve Sedgwick writes that, 'Queer can refer to: the open match of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, distances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone's gender, of anyone's sexuality aren't made (or can't be made) to signify monolithically'. At the same time, queer also refers to homosexuality, and 'for anyone to disavow those meanings, or to displace them from the term's definitional center, would be to dematerialize any possibility of queerness itself' (Sedgwick, 1993:8). In many discourses, including activist ones, queer is much more likely to refer to the second definition than the first (Gamson, 1996; Halperin, 1995), thus, 'simply reinscribing the exclusive understanding of sexual identities' (Rahman, 2000:127). Judith Butler (1993) questions the possibility of reclaiming a term that has historically produced a subject through shaming and pathologisation. She argues that the history of the word is not erased through 'reclamation',

but lingers in any usage. For this reason, 'queer' suffers similar problems to 'gay', enacting what Foucault has referred to as a 'reverse discourse'. The signification of queer as deviant risks the production of a new normalising category, in which all forms of sexualised (and gendered) transgression become understood as variations of a single category. This is realised with the development of queer as an inherently exclusive, albeit broad, identity. Indeed, the capacity to claim the term can be influenced by locations of class, ethnicity, age, religion, sexuality and other aspects of life experience and social practices. Queer theorists provide a valuable critique of identity politics but in emphasising the hetero/homo division and especially gay and lesbian identities, 'queer theory' risks acting as a more critical version of gay and lesbian studies. Queer approaches rarely address bisexual (Hemmings, 2002; Young, 1997) and transgender identities, let alone move outside the four boxes of contemporary liberal LGBT identity politics. At the same time, queer theory focuses much more on homosexuality than on heterosexuality. Queer feminist work (especially Butler) provide the major exceptions (see also Thomas, 2000). This emphasis on homosexuality is not simply a problem of queer theory, but is rooted in a sociological tradition where research is focused on deviant or 'marked' social categories rather than those considered 'unmarked' such as heterosexuality (Brekhus, 1998). One of the most important insights of queer theory is that the hetero/homo binary is implicated in all aspects of 'Western' social knowledge and organisation. To limit this insight to a focus on homosexuality would be a great loss.

## Queer Culture

Queer theory suggests that the strength of male domination and heterosexism is not simply due to tradition, prejudice or socialisation, 'but a basic way of organising knowledges and fields of daily life which are deeply articulated in the core social practices of Western societies' (Seidman, 1997: 157). Queer emphasises the cultural politics of knowledge and a deconstructionist assault on the hetero/homo dichotomy. 'Although discursive interventions certainly have material effects on the production of the real, how exactly the resignification works towards political and social change needs to be explained' (Glick, 2000: 33). Even the father of deconstruction suggests that discursive approaches cannot be separated from institutional analysis.

What is somewhat hastily called deconstruction is not ... a specialised set of discursive procedures ... [but] a way of taking a position, in its work of

analysis, concerning the political and institutional structures that make possible and govern our practices ... Precisely because it is never concerned only with signified content, deconstruction should not be separable from this politico-institutional problematic (Derrida, quoted in Seidman, 1997: 156).

Clearly, knowledge is an important terrain for political activism. But, if 'sexual orientation' is also integral to the organisation of economic and political systems, action limited to cultural forms is unlikely to bring about the radical social change necessary to eliminate the hetero/homo division at the centre of queer critique.

### Addressing Criticisms

These criticisms can largely be addressed through returning to the anarchist roots of queer politics. The argument that queer promotes an individualistic politics compatible with neoliberalism are only comprehensible if one fails to recognise the possibility of (communist) anarchism. Teresa Ebert (1995) clearly points out that the work of Butler and Foucault is opposed to State authority.

Ludic theories of power in feminism are aimed at displacing any centralized or systematic exercise of political, social or symbolic authority. These theories, however, take the state (not capital) to be the primary arena for the exercise of centralized power. For instance, the Foucauldian analytic is fundamentally anti-Statist with its critique of juridical and sovereign theories of power and substitution of diffuse, dispersed and anti-authoritarian -- because indeterminate, acausal, contingent and reversible -- theories of power.

Ebert's Marxism neglects the libertarian tradition when she insists upon the 'revolutionary necessity of appropriating [State] power'. But one need not be committed to the Marxist ideal of State socialism to fail to take seriously the anarchism of queer theory. Steven Seidman is also confused by the radical individuality promoted by queer theory.

Despite its critique of methodological individualism or the view of the individual as the source and centre of knowledge, society, and history, much queer theory, at least its deconstructive currents, is wedded to a social vision whose ultimate value lies in promoting individuality and tolerance of difference; where queer theory does not edge into an anarchistic social ideal it gestures towards a democratic pluralistic ideal (Seidman, 1997: 157).

Although he uses the label anarchist to describe queer politics, he never acknowledges, much less examines, the theoretical and activist traditions that go along with that word. This mistake is repeated by queer theorists and leaves them open to charges of promoting a politics compatible with capitalism. Similarly, while most of the queer activisms described above proclaim an anti-capitalist politics, it is not always entirely clear how their actions aim to produce alternative forms of production, consumption and exchange or to ameliorate poverty and alienation.

Queer does not necessarily have to be understood as transgressive. It does necessarily promote breaking the rules that produce the hetero/homo division. But breaking rules for the sake of breaking rules is merely transgressive. Breaking rules to produce new realities is prefigurative. 'Prefiguration, the demonstration or rehearsal or sample of how life can be in a better world is usually but not always transgressive' (Greenway, 1997: 175). Prefigurative politics are central to anarchism, which refuses to construct a division between ends and means (i.e. consequentialism). Bookchin noted 'it is plain that the goal of revolution today must be the liberation of daily life. ...there *can be no separation of the revolutionary process from the revolutionary goal*' (Bookchin 1974: 44-45 original emphasis). More recently, Cindy Milstein has argued that the contemporary anarchist 'movement is quietly yet crucially supplying the outlines of a freer society ... where the means themselves are understood to also be the ends' (2000). Prefigurative queer politics, then, do not simply defy or mock the heter/homo division, but create cultural resources, forms of organisation, relationships and networks, that not only resist normalisation but support and enable antinormalist realities. Again, some of the examples I described earlier, Queeruption and Greenham in particular, should be understood as prefigurative rather than simply transgressive.

More specifically, though, queer politics has been criticised for promoting transgressive sexual practices. These might only be seen as prefigurative in a limited sense of what an individual (or couple or group) would like their sexual life to be like. Thus, Glick's reading of queer politics as a promotion of the possibility of 'fuck[ing] our way to freedom' (2000:15). How, for example, can sadomasochism be understood to be prefigurative rather than transgressive?

In reference to a man who pays to be spanked, diapered, breastfed, or



forced to 'crawl around the floor doing the vacuum with a cucumber up his bum' ..., we need to ask what material changes are effected once the investment banker has removed the cucumber from his ass and returned to his office? (Stabile, quoted in Glick, 2000:40)

Indeed, this example is clearly transgressive rather than prefigurative, particularly as the dominant discursive regime in which both the sexual acts and our man's life exist are structured by non-consensual capitalist relationships of domination and submission. More generally, however, BDSM can be considered play, both in the theatrical and pleasure-oriented senses of the word. Thus, 'domination' in this context is as much like being queer-bashed as losing at Monopoly is like poverty. What would the workplace be like if we had safewords, or negotiated the conditions of our labour as equals? Liz Highleyman (1997), in an anarchist analysis of BDSM, argued that,

SM play involves interpersonal power exchange, which is diametrically opposed to real world authoritarian roles, which are typically unidirectional. One participant is always on top, and the other is always on the bottom. Except in rare circumstances, the victim of the cop, soldier, or warden does not have the opportunity to 'exchange' any power whatsoever. Pat Califia has noted that perhaps the reason erotic dominance and submission is so threatening to the established order is because SM roles are so fluid.

Similarly, although writing on a very different subject and not from an explicitly anarchist perspective, social theorist Barry Barnes emphasised the importance of differentiating between different meanings of the word hierarchy.

Hierarchy may voluntarily be constituted, on the spot and temporarily, by the unconstrained action of those involved, to hunt, for example, or to fish or to climb. Members may actively seek subordinate rather than superordinate positions in such ad hoc hierarchies, and find no difficulty resuming normal equal relationships once the task at hand has been accomplished. Thus, when we look at the semi-permanent bureaucratic hierarchies of modern industrial societies and note how they make social power differentially available, we should take care not to conflate the evaluation of those systems with an evaluation of hierarchy *per se* (1995: 193-94).

Anarchism, much like ethical BDSM, rejects the legitimacy of stable hierarchies that result in real forms of domination for consensual and fluid power relations. As Foucault pointed out,

all relationships, and thus all forms of organisation, involve power (1980). While domination (real or play) always involves power, power does not always involve domination. Sadomasochistic sexual practices, along with some other 'transgressive' forms of sex, can thus be seen as prefigurative as they promote an alternative ethic of fluid relationships of power, of active consent, and an ethic of pleasure (see also, Albury, 2002; Warner, 1999). Not all forms of 'transgressive' sex are prefigurative of queer anarchist realities. Rejection of actual (not play) domination clearly eliminates rape, sexual assault and harassment from the list of acceptable sexual activities and necessitates complex discussions about intergenerational sex involving young people. At the same time, it is important to recognise that a wide variety of sexual practices can embody queer/anarchist/feminist ethics and that no particular (consensual) sexual practices are more or less revolutionary than others. The danger of associating transgressive sexual practices, or even sexual practice in general, with sexual radicalism has been opened up for discussion within queer anarchist networks (A Queeruption Berlin working group, 2003). More importantly, in order for queer politics to successfully disrupt the hetero/homo division, it must also disrupt all the hierarchical binaries with which it is intertwined. These hierarchies must be challenged in *all relationships*, not only sexual ones.

Criticisms of queer theory claiming particular territory from feminism are easily addressed. Anarchist politics aims to eliminate all forms of domination and should draw upon whatever tools are consistent with that aim, whatever their label. As relationships of domination are increasingly recognised to be deeply interconnected, reducing the validity of analysis based on class, race, sexuality, gender or other social divisions as independent social formations, it makes sense to turn to anarchist theory to understand relations of domination and other forms of anarchist practice to challenge them. Although certain strains of anarchist politics (i.e., a rigid class struggle anarchism) may prioritise one area of domination over others, contemporary anarchist politics address a wide variety of oppressions and their intersections in particular locations (e.g., Jeppesen, 2004; Notes from Nowhere, 2003). At the same time, queer theory should not be limited to a focus on homosexuality. The homocentrism of activism labelled 'queer' may be more difficult to escape. Like anarchy, it is a term that should be used tactically with sensitivity to other people's likely assumptions about the meaning of the word and consequently their ability to feel included. A queer politics enacted entirely by 'queers' is as likely to remain as ineffective as an anarchist politics enacted only by 'anarchists', or indeed any politics enacted only by 'activists' (Anonymous 2000a and 2000b). In either case, the aim should not be to recruit people to a particular label, but to encourage

critical thought and action for social and environmental justice (see Heckert, 2002).

This does require a cultural politics of knowledge, but cannot be limited to that. Anarchist politics depend upon a combination of cultural critique and alternative knowledge production with prefigurative practices of mutual aid. A cultural politics of knowledge is necessary for enabling people to view (possibilities of) reality differently from the perspectives encouraged through authoritarian discourses of corporate media and State propaganda and the racist, sexist, heterosexist, etc. relationships of domination upon which they depend and which they encourage. In 1950s and 60s France, the Situationists, a group of anti-authoritarian Marxists, argued that capitalism cannot be resisted by seizing the State apparatus but can be subverted through alternative aesthetic practices (Debord, 1971 [1967]; Vaneigem, 1994 [1967]). They advocated *détournement*, that is the practice of modifying capitalist 'signs', such as advertisements, to change the message and encourage the viewer to recognise the manipulative nature of capitalism. This tactic, now more commonly referred to as 'subvertising', is still popular among anti-capitalist activists (see e.g., Klein, 2000). The slick Canadian magazine *Adbusters* takes advantage of graphic design software to produce 'subverts' that are indistinguishable from adverts, apart from their content. An anarchist cultural politics of knowledge also involves a more direct production of alternative discourses through film, fiction, news (e.g., *Indymedia*), and art (see e.g., Antliff, 2003; Jordan, 1998; Moore, 1998). Indeed, the greatest popular experiment in anarchist organisation in recent history, the Spanish revolution of 1936-1939 (see e.g., Acklesberg, 1991; Bookchin, 1997) depended as much upon the 'cultural' as upon anarcho-syndicalist unions which seized the means of production, women's collectives which challenged sexism, and other forms of institutional change (Cleminson, 2003). As important as cultural forms of resistance are, it is not sufficient to write about how the State, the university and the liberal individualism of capitalism depend upon a hetero/homo division or to do queer readings of Shakespeare. A successful queer politics must also engage in direct action to address human needs and desires, inhibit relationships of domination and develop alternatives to authoritarian institutions. As Steven Seidman argues, 'If we are to recover a fuller social critical perspective and a transformative political vision, one fruitful direction is to articulate a politics of knowledge with an institutional social analysis that does not disavow a willingness to spell out its own ethical standpoint' (1997: 161). A closer look at the anarchism of poststructuralism, the third root of queer politics, helps us to do that.

## The Anarchy of Poststructuralism

Debates on the political value of poststructuralist philosophy, particularly intense in the 1990s, have been dubbed the 'theory wars' (Duggan, 1998). Poststructuralist writing has been criticised for its inaccessibility. Furthermore, while philosophers such as Foucault and Deleuze have identified themselves as radical, their work has rarely addressed activist struggles directly (Dempsey and Rowe, 2004). The problem here is the limited interaction between theorists and activists, rather than inherent limitations in the political value of poststructuralist philosophy. Among the most outspoken left academic critics has been Barbara Epstein who charges poststructuralism with inhibiting progressive politics.

The version of poststructuralism that has been adopted by feminists and other progressives mostly has had the effect of undermining social analysis, replacing concern for social change with concern for intellectual and aesthetic sophistication. . . . The principles that dominate radical poststructuralism, including anti-essentialism, the rejection of metanarratives, the insistence that everything must be understood as socially constructed, the rejection of claims of truth or value, are exaggerated versions of one-sided, partial insights. Poststructuralism is not driven by some secret plot to destroy progressive movements, but it nevertheless has the effect of disorienting efforts toward a progressive analysis (cited in Duggan, 1998).

It is precisely the principles that Epstein denigrates that have developed through the radical activism I described in the previous chapter. Criticisms of essentialist feminism or gay politics have been put forth by those excluded by singular definitions (see also Duggan, 1998). If, as I have suggested, radical politics should answer the question of how to challenge relationships of domination without producing new ones, then the recent history of gender and sexuality politics demonstrates the value of these principles. Dempsey and Rowe (2004), also responding to Epstein, suggests that perhaps her greatest difficulty with poststructuralism is that it has no intention of providing a single analysis on which to provide the basis for 'progressive politics'. One of the defining characteristics of poststructuralist political philosophy is the impossibility of a grand theory to eliminate all forms of domination, because a grand theory (truth-claim) is a discursive act of domination.

According to Dempsey and Rowe, the theory wars in North America were finally silenced by the success of the anti-capitalist-global demonstration in Seattle in 1999. Here was

a clear example of successful poststructuralist political activism. The events in Seattle, and subsequent demonstrations/disruptions of G8 and WTO summits, have been based on diverse and decentralised networks consistent with poststructuralist advocacy of difference. This is consistent with Foucault's advice on preventing fascist tendencies arising in revolutionary practice: 'Prefer what is positive and multiple, difference over uniformity, flows over unities, mobile arrangements over systems. Believe that what is productive is not sedentary but nomadic' (Foucault, 1983:xiv). I suggest that one key root of the theory wars was a result of limited imagination, the incapacity to perceive a politics based on neither categorical identities or political parties that rejected all forms of domination and exclusion. Besides its inaccessibility, I suggest the main reason poststructuralist political philosophy has remained so incomprehensible is because its politics are neither individualistic nor programmatic, but anarchist.

Dempsey and Rowe are not the first to argue for an anarchist reading of poststructuralism. Gayatri Spivak and Michael Ryan (1978) wrote an early article drawing similar conclusions. Ryan described the politics of Foucault and Deleuze as

a rejection of authority of any kind whatsoever (be it right or left), [...] that the only political alternative is a perpetual revolt which dances constantly out of the grasp of the Master in the hope of a future free from mastery; a condemnation of reason as a weapon which reinforces mastery in the form of state power; and finally (and it is this which has earned them notoriety) an arraignment of Eurocommunism, as well as of Marx and socialism in general, as a modern Master whose inevitable expression is Gulag. An anarchist like Bakunin might have smiled benevolently, paternally upon them (pp 67-68).

More recently, Todd May (1989, 1994, 1995), Saul Newman (2001) and Lewis Call (2003) have argued that poststructuralist philosophy should be seen as a new stage in anarchist politics, respectively dubbed 'poststructuralist anarchism', 'postanarchism' and 'postmodern anarchism'. Their work has been taken up by activists and intellectuals. The growing examination of intersections of poststructuralism and anarchism is visible in active online networks, fora and listserves (see e.g. Adams, 2003) as well as academic and activist writing on the anarchism and poststructuralism of the alternative globalisation movement (e.g., Carter and Morland, 2004; Chesters, 2003; Epstein, 2001; Graeber, 2002; Notes from Nowhere, 2003; Sheehan, 2003; Starhawk, 2002; Tormey, 2004).

The trend to see the poststructuralist writings of Deleuze and Foucault, among others, as a new form of anarchism has not gone without criticism. Jesse Cohn and Shawn Wilbur (Cohn, 2002; Cohn and Wilbur, 2003) are optimistic about the value of poststructuralist thought to anarchist projects, but critical of constructing a poststructuralism as 'the new anarchism' in opposition to an out-of-date and philosophically naive 'classical anarchism'. May, Newman and Call all depend, to varying degrees, on defining classical anarchism in terms of doctrine as written by European notables such as Bakunin, Kropotkin and Proudhon. This is problematic for a number of reasons. First, it neglects the complexity of ideas on topics such as power and human nature within the writings of these men. Second, it ignores the writing of other key figures of this period, including anarcho-feminists such as Emma Goldman and Voltairine de Cleyre, whose ideas challenged the postanarchist representation of 'classical anarchism' (see Dark Star Collective, 2003). Third, it produces anarchism as a fixed object from the past rather than an ongoing tendency in human history, which is always specific to socio-historical contexts. This very representation of anarchism, problematic in poststructuralist terms, allows the authors to produce their various 'post' anarchisms as new and oppositional, when it might be more accurate to acknowledge the reciprocal relationships between developing traditions of anarchism. This is the more open approach to intersections of poststructuralism and anarchism advocated at the Postanarchism Clearinghouse, whose introductory line is 'neither the normalization of classical anarchism nor the depoliticization of poststructuralism' (Adams, 2003).

### An Anarchist Poststructuralist Framework

My aim is to develop the possibilities for understanding the ongoing construction of 'sexual orientation' through intersections of poststructuralism and anarchism, while drawing upon queer and feminist politics. If, as I have implied, anarchist ideals can be seen both in criticisms of compulsory sexuality (heterosexual, lesbian, or transgressive) and in attempting to develop anti-authoritarian ethics and relationships (antipatriarchal, antihomophobic, or antinormative), then this approach is not particularly original. However, I suggest that an explicitly anarchist critique of sexual orientation is valuable in recontextualising histories, understanding contemporary experiences, and developing new forms of social relationships and movement.

Despite the limitations of Todd May's (and others') arguments for French poststructuralist theory as a *new* anarchism, I have found the framework he develops under that name to be very valuable for understanding this concept we call 'sexual orientation'. Furthermore, it helps to address the limitations ascribed to poststructuralist and queer theories. Seidman (1997) among others has been concerned by the failure of queer theorists to specify any ethical commitments. Todd May (1994) argues that while poststructuralist theorists may resist spelling out their ethical principles in order to avoid producing a foundation from their anti-foundational critiques, one can nonetheless find an unspoken ethics within this body of work. May's framework entails five conceptual components, including ethical principles: 1) structure and power as decentralised, relational and non-deterministic forces, which are continuously produced by human action; 2) a rejection of essentialist humanism for a performative understanding of human identity; 3) a radical ethical critique of representation; 4) an ethical commitment to difference; and, 5) a multivalue consequentialist understanding of both history and ethics. These components intersect to produce not only tools for understanding social life, but for radical social change.

### Structure & Power: the continuous and pluralistic production of social reality

In his effort to explore the relationship between anarchism and French poststructuralism, Todd May suggests that we can differentiate between a 'tactical' politics from those which he terms 'strategic'. The defining characteristic of May's notion of strategic political philosophy is that it 'involves a unitary analysis that aims toward a single goal' (p 10). For Marxism, this would be the capitalist economic system or for certain feminist philosophies, gender relations. In these cases, all forms of oppression and injustice can be reduced to a singular source (e.g. capitalism or patriarchy). This source, then, is the centre from which all power emanates. This conception of centralised power underlies the strategic notion that particular subject positions can be better placed to understand and address the problematic of power. Thus, traditional Marxist groups incorporate a party vanguard who claim power in the name of the proletariat. Cultural feminism is similar in this respect in the suggestion that women (especially lesbian women), by virtue of their oppressed status, possess particular knowledge of the social world and are placed to produce revolutionary change.

Some poststructuralist theory, on the other hand, defines a tradition of tactical political philosophy. A tactical approach argues that there is no centre of power, that it is

irreducible to any particular source (e.g. capitalism or patriarchy). Instead, Deleuze and Guattari, for example, use a metaphor of the rhizome to describe power -- neither has a centre, a beginning or an end; both form complex intersecting patterns. Likewise, Foucault suggests that power is exercised in multiple forms, through diverse social relations and in 'dispersed, heteromorphous, localised procedures' (1980: 142). It was the anti-authoritarian student and worker uprisings of Paris 1968 that inspired and encouraged Foucault to carry on with his efforts to understand relations of domination outwith those traditionally analysed by Marxism.

Where [USSR State] power was in question, its opponents called it totalitarianism; power in Western capitalism was denounced by the Marxists as class domination; but the mechanics of power in themselves were never analysed. This task could only begin after 1968, that is to say on the basis of daily struggles at grass roots level, among those whose fight was located in the fine meshes of the web of power. This was where the concrete nature of power became visible, along with the prospect that these analyses of power would prove fruitful in accounting for all that had hitherto remained outside the field of political analysis. To put it very simply, psychiatric internment, the mental normalisation of individuals, and penal institutions have no doubt a fairly limited importance if one is only looking for the economic significance. On the other hand, they are undoubtedly essential to the general functioning of the wheels of power. So long as the posing of the question of power was subordinate to the economic instance and the system of interests which this served, there was a tendency to regard these problems as of small importance (Foucault, 1980:116).

Although Foucault had begun to explore the issue of power before 1968, it was his experience of radical social change that spurred him on. While Guattari had long been politically active, Deleuze was to become deeply politicised by the events of 1968. Only after these revolutionary days did Deleuze become involved with political movement and activism, including the *Groupe d'Information sur les Prisons* (GIP) initiated by Foucault and others. He also worked in support of the Palestinian and homosexual people and in opposition to the Gulf War and the French nuclear strike force (Patton, 2000). In a sense, then, the suggestion that Foucault and Deleuze invented a new form of anarchism (May, 1994) fails to recognise the activist and anarchist contexts within which their work developed (see also Halperin, 1995:25-26 on Foucault).

This anarchist approach to social organisation might also be understood as recognising structures as internal to human relations rather than as sources of power outside the social realm. Thus, poststructuralism does not, as some have suggested, deny the reality of



either domination and oppression, or the apparent stability of 'structures' such as capitalism and government. Rather, theorists such as Foucault and Deleuze argue that structures are not fixed, nor are they historical forces that are simply maintained, but that these apparent structures are *continuously produced* through social relations. In theory, people could choose to produce very different forms of social organisation (including anarchism) by changing the nature of their social relationships. This argument is continuous with elements of 'classical' anarchism. German anarchist Gustav Landauer, a contemporary of Bakunin, declared that:

The state is not something which can be destroyed by a revolution, but is a condition, a certain relationship between human beings, a mode of human behaviour; we destroy it by contracting other relationships, by behaving differently (quoted in Ward, 2004:8).

In practice, such activity is difficult, but not impossible. Such action, however, requires a tactical approach -- the application of power within local and specific contexts. If, as Foucault and Deleuze argue, power has no centre, then the vanguardist approach promoted by Leninist-Marxism and lesbian feminism must be rejected. Likewise, Ebert's (1995) criticism of Foucault (and Butler) as anarcho-capitalists who fail to recognise the exploitation of capitalism misinterprets Foucault's anarchism. It is not simply the State, as a set of juridical and disciplinary apparatuses, that Foucault opposes, but the State-like relationships of power (e.g., disciplinary, penal or psychiatric) whose cumulative effects *are* the State; simultaneously, the state apparatus depends upon such decentralised relationships of power and obedience in order to exist. Echoing Landauer, Foucault elaborated this point with respect to the relationship between the family and the State:

The family, even now, is not a simple reflection or extension of the power of the State; it does not act as the representative of the State in relation to children, just as male does not act as its representative with respect to the female. For the State to function in the way it does, there must be, between male and female or adult and child, quite specific relations of domination which have their own configuration and relative autonomy (Foucault, 1980: 187-188).

As capitalism, like the State, depends on dispersed relationships of domination, Foucault's work should clearly be understood as anti-capitalist. If oppression is experienced in diverse locations and is produced by the intersection of various forces, it is difficult to imagine that any one group of people can claim a social position that better enables them to politically

address these problems than anyone else. In this respect, the work of Foucault and Deleuze is very much anarchist in that it rejects vanguardism and promotes an ethic of decentralised social action. At the same time, in recognising the multiplicity of the State, poststructuralist theorisation often surpasses other aspects of anarchist thought in acknowledging the internal contradictions of the State<sup>2</sup> (e.g., Pringle and Watson, 1992).

Importantly, then, power cannot be understood as suppressive, but productive. Power does not emanate down from the State, but the State may be considered that name which we give to the oppressive effects produced through decentralised relations of domination, surveillance, representation and control. According to 'stateless theories of the State', the State is a discursive effect rather than an autonomous agent outside of social relations (see Jessop, 2001 for overview). Likewise, relations of power can also produce more desirable effects, in anarchist terms, such as food cooperatives, workplace resistance, community organisation or the production of anarchist theory. This analysis is important for (sexual) politics, for, as Todd May (1994) argues,

if power is conceived as operating not upon its objects but within them, not 'from above' but 'from below,' not outside other relationships but across them, this entails that power is not a suppressive force but a creative one, giving rise not only to that which must be resisted but also, and more insidiously, to the forms resistance itself often takes. That is what makes specific political analysis necessary: if power creates its own resistance, then the liberation from specific forms of power must take account of the kind of resistance that is being engaged in, on pain of repeating that which one is trying to escape (73).

While both lesbian feminism and sexual citizenship aim to undermine relations of domination, their success in this regard must necessarily be limited. This limitation is due in part to the discursive nature of power: to claim access to the 'truth' of the best strategy for liberation, one is necessarily making of unquestionable authority – an act of domination. Likewise, these strategies depend upon surveillance and policing, that is the production of knowledge or its it for its determining who is inside and who is outside the charmed circle of either sisterhood or citizenship. As Foucault has argued (1975, 1980), knowledge and power are inseparable.

### **Practising/Producing the Embodied Self**

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2 While Post-Marxist theorisation of the State also challenges the notion of a monolithic institution (e.g. Laclau and Mouffe, 1985), it fails to escape the liberal logic of representation and the state apparatus (Day, 2005).

One of the challenging claims of poststructuralist theorising is that subjectivity itself is an effect of relationships of power. This fundamentally destabilises the liberal social contract theory which imagines a pre-social subjects who agrees to particular social arrangements rather than subjectivities produced by those arrangements. In queer theory, this has been popularised in Butler's formulation of gender performativity and a general commitment to anti-essentialism. Indeed, this provides the core to rejecting not only identity politics, but more the nuanced theoretical development of sexual citizenship. For these politics depend upon a belief, or at least a pretence, that there are gays and lesbians, rather than gay and lesbian subjectivities that are constituted through particular relations of power. Although the deployment of power is inextricable from ongoing productions of knowledge, the social significance of discursive production is not limited to the intellectual - subjectivities are embodied. Recent developments in feminist poststructuralist theory (e.g., Butler 1990, 1993; Gatens, 1996; Grosz, 1994, 1995; Rafanell, 2003), in particular, argue that human bodies are themselves, in a very important sense, constructed.

Feminist theorising has long assumed a sex/gender distinction where the former is a fact of nature and the latter is a social product (Harrison and Hood-Williams, 2002). Indeed, feminism as identity politics benefits from the category of 'women' having an unquestioned, if not *quite* essential, ontological status; the 'naturalness' of the material body has been called upon to provide this. But, asks Judith Butler (1993), what puts the body outside the realm of that which is constructed? Indeed, isn't the very discursive act of *placing* the body outside an aspect of its construction as natural? More importantly, she asks, what relations of power, what social exclusions are hidden from investigation if the 'truth' of bodies is beyond question?

The supposed truth of sex, which can be imagined to be read off of bodies, Butler argues, is better read as the effect of 'regulatory schemas that produce intelligible morphological possibilities' (p14). In her formulation, 'sex' is produced through the continuous discursive reiteration of its supposedly pre-discursive existence. In this sense, she argues, 'sex' is very much like law. In challenging the 'truth' of sexed bodies, and simultaneously the truth of law, Butler provides an invaluable resource for both queer/feminist challenges to naturalised heterosexism and anarchist challenges to legal

authority.

The presumption that the symbolic law of sex enjoys separate ontology prior and autonomous to its assumption is contravened by the notion that the citation of the law is the very mechanism of its production and articulation. What is "forced" by the symbolic, then, is a citation of its law that reiterates and consolidates the ruse of its own force. What would it mean to "cite" the law to produce it differently, to "cite" the law in order to reinterpret and coopt its power, to expose the heterosexual matrix and to displace the effect of its necessity? (p15)

In other words, sex, like law, is a process rather than an accomplished fact (whether imagined to be natural or social). Indeed, neither can be fully accomplished. The power of either to demand obedience and conformity is dependent upon claims of authority, of truth, being continuously produced through reiterated citation (e.g., 'because it's the law, ma'am'). Therein lies the possibility for resistance, for nothing *requires* us to reiterate or cite the law (of sex or otherwise) obediently. Rather, we may feel capable, in particular contexts, of citing selectively and creatively a number of sources to produce reality differently. However, the first act of the law is to create bodies afraid to resist. 'There must be a body trembling before the law, a body whose fear can be compelled by the law, a law that produces the trembling body prepared for its inscription, a law that marks the body *first* with fear only then to mark it again with the symbolic stamp of sex' (p101).

Fearful and obedient embodied subjectivities are produced, in part, through the discursive construction of a dualist hierarchy of mind over body. This division has been influential in the development of sociology, with its critique of biological determinism, perhaps disguising a fear of corporeality, resulting in a neglect of the body in sociological theory until recently (Turner, 1996). This neglect may also be understood as an effect of hierarchies of men and masculinity (associated with mind) over women and femininity (associated with body) as well as hierarchies of sexuality where particular practices and desires are constructed as irrational or out-of-control (uncivilised bodies). As these concerns are essential to queer and feminist interventions in academia and elsewhere, the importance of the body has increasingly been acknowledged in sociological work. Anarchism must share these concerns, not only because of its critique of hierarchy in general, but also because of the ways in which gendered and sexualised constructions of the body are used to produce fearful and obedient subjectivities.

Can it be that in the West, in our time, the female body has been constructed not only as a lack or absence but with more complexity, as a leaking, uncontrollable, seeping liquid; as formless flow; as viscosity, entrapping, secreting; as lacking not so much or simply the phallus but self-containment -- not a cracked or porous vessel, like a leaking ship, but a formlessness that engulfs all form, *a disorder that threatens all order?* [...] The metaphors of uncontrollability, the ambivalence between desperate, fatal attraction and strong revulsion, the deep-seated fear of absorption, the association of femininity with contagion and disorder, the undecidability of the limits of the female body (particularly, but not only, with the onset of puberty and in the case of pregnancy), its powers of cynical seduction and allure are all common themes in literary and cultural representations of women. But these may well be a function of the projection outward of their own corporealities, the liquidities that men seem to want to cast out of their own self-representations (Grosz, 1994:203; emphasis added).

Does not this construction of the female body indicate a desire for and fear of anarchy - a disorder that threatens all order? Does that anarchy of (women's) bodies threaten all order, or merely those authoritarian forms of order that depend upon fantasies of intellectual certainty and truth, fantasies of controllable and controlled bodies/desires/intimacies? These are the authoritarian fantasies Judith Butler challenges when she questions the very nature of bodies. 'To problematise the matter of bodies may entail an initial loss of epistemological certainty, but a loss of certainty is not the same as political nihilism. On the contrary, such a loss may well indicate a significant and promising shift in political thinking. This unsettling of "matter" can be understood as initiating new possibilities, new ways for bodies to matter' (1993:30).

It is no wonder that recent developments in queer, feminist and poststructuralist work provoke strong emotion - whether fear, desire, both or otherwise. Not only do they challenge dominant understandings of the political, but simultaneously and necessarily they challenge our very understanding of our bodies, ourselves. The extent of this challenge, I suggest, is difficult to take on board if one assumes the necessity of the State. Arguing that subjectivity, including to a significant degree our very embodiment, is produced through relationships of power is not simply a 'theoretical' problem, but an ethical one. But, as many have asked, how can this translate into practical politics?

Part of the dilemma of Queer activism is created by the institutionalised procedures of democratic engagement and the need therein for some form

of representative identity and ... [that] this need for essential political identity is a central dilemma for any politics of social oppression (Rahman, 2000: 128).

The answer lies in politics without representation.

## An Anti-representationalist Ethic

'The first ethical principle to which poststructuralism is committed is that practices of representing others to themselves -- either in who they are or in what they want -- ought, as much as possible, to be avoided' (May, 1994:130).

In rejecting the notion of a human (or gay, etc.) essence, it is consistent to reject the humanist notion of discovering and cultivating this essence. If indeed the epistemological project of 'understanding' an essence is at the same time a political project of defining and constraining human potential, then we must understand representation of a subject or a category of subjects as an act of violence. This violence applies to acts of representation in both senses of the term. To claim the authority to speak for another is a violation of that person's capacity to define themselves, which they must have some ability to do if they have no essence. 'Practices of telling people who they are and what they want erect a barrier between them and who (or what) they can create themselves to be' (May, 1994:131). This is not to suggest a voluntaristic notion of the self, where one can choose who or what they want to be in the same sense that one can choose one's wardrobe. Identity is produced through numerous relations of power and social practices, over which one can only have limited control. To inhibit people's capacities to make themselves the selves they want to be, through engagement in particular social practices, is unethical. This first sense of representation thus relates to the second: to speak for others depends upon claims to define others, that is to say who they really are or what their interests are, which is in itself an oppressive relationship. A rejection of representation is essential to direct or participatory democracy as well as to poststructuralist critiques of essentialism. According to Deleuze, it was Foucault 'who taught the intellectuals of his generation the indignity of speaking for others' (Patton, 2000: 146). In an interview Deleuze said, 'we ridiculed representation and said it was finished, but we failed to draw the consequences of this "theoretical" conversation -- to appreciate the theoretical fact that only those directly concerned can speak in a practical way on their own behalf' (Foucault

1977b:209). The critique of representation is, at the same time, an anticapitalist sentiment. The apparatuses upon which capitalist social relations depend -- factories, schools, prisons, hospitals and the military -- function through disciplinary techniques, producing docility.

'What was then being formed was a policy of coercions that act on the body, a calculated manipulation of its elements, its gestures, its behavior. The human body was entering a machinery of power that explores it, breaks it down and rearranges it. [...] Thus, discipline produces subjected and practiced bodies, "docile" bodies' (Foucault 1977a: 138-9).

Thus, discipline aims to produce 'the obedient subject, the individual subjected to habits, rules, orders, and authority that is exercised continually around him [sic] and upon him, and which he must allow to function automatically in him' (ibid. pp128-129). These docile bodies, then, are not only obedient to the authority of the State apparatus and the figure of the Boss, but the habits of gender and sexual orientation, among others. Resistance, however, is possible. Alternatively, 'practices of freedom' (Foucault, 1988a) resist representation and produce very different subjectivities. Such is a key argument of anarchism. The question of anarchist practicality is not whether all individuals now are immediately capable of self-management, equality and freedom, but whether human beings are capable of becoming so. If we reject essentialist notions of 'human nature', then we must at least accept that it is a possibility. Consistent with Foucault, Carole Pateman points out, 'participation develops and fosters the very qualities necessary for it; the more individuals participate the better able they become to do so.' (1970: 42-43).

The phrase 'policing sexualities' is comprehensible only because we recognise the commonalities of State policing operations and the practices of violence, sometimes symbolic, that punish transgressions of rules regarding sexuality (or behaviours associated with sexuality, especially gender performance); these rules are, of course, not universal but produced within the context of particular practices, which are, in turn, tied to local identities. While the police are at the most blatant and visible location of the exercise of State violence and of State claims to sovereignty (Agamben, 2000), those who find themselves exercising violence to maintain identity boundaries do not necessarily wear uniforms. Then again, a wo/man with long hair and lipstick who gets dirty looks (or worse) in a lesbian/straight bar is experiencing violence precisely because s/he does not conform to an unwritten dress code. If we accept Foucault's analysis, that power is diffuse, relational and it 'comes from below' (1990: 94), then the policing operation of sexual orientation and that of the State are not

necessarily so different. Sexual orientation does not require its own professional police, though arguably they exist, for the same reason that a State apparatus cannot rely entirely on police to maintain power. Both sexual orientation and states do, however, both require policing - whether official or unofficial, self-directed or through violence directed towards others.

## The Value of Difference

In keeping with the principle of antirepresentation, the second ethical principle of anarchist poststructuralism is 'that alternative practices, all things being equal, ought to be allowed to flourish and even to be promoted' (May, 1994:133). This principle, too, is a key commitment of queer theory. The first axiom of Eve Sedgwick's germinal work, *Epistemology of the Closet*, is that 'people are different from each other' (1990:22). As I highlighted in the previous chapter, issues of difference are essential to debates on the politics of sexuality. Queer theory, in keeping with its anarchist and poststructuralist roots, advocates a politics of difference. Its refusal to articulate an ethical principle of antirepresentation has resulted in a misunderstanding of this commitment to difference. For example, Sheila Jefferies (1993) has suggested that paedophilia, and Stephen Angelides (1994) rape, might also constitute sexual difference that would then be necessarily promoted by queer politics. However, rape certainly involves representation in the sense of not listening to what someone else wants (or does not want); paedophilia, depending on how one defines it, is very likely to do so as well. Thus, in these cases, all things are not equal. So, promoting difference is not to advocate 'anarchy' in the sense of a lack of ethical standards, but anarchy in the sense of people deciding for themselves how to live their lives without being told (or feeling) that they are doing it wrong. From a rejection of the coherent, rational, individual self in favour of a fluidity and multiplicity of desires embodied within each 'individual' to a rejection of over deterministic notions of structure for a decentralised conception of power, poststructuralist anarchist thought prioritises the value and necessity of difference over identity.

## Of Ends and Means

Finally, poststructuralist ethics can be understood in terms of consequentialism: that the ends cannot be separated from the means. Consequentialism has deep roots within the



anarchist tradition, exemplified by Bakunin's debates with Marx over the possibility of a 'workers' State' withering away to result in an egalitarian society. Bakunin's recognition that oppressive power is not centralised within capitalism and that history is a continuous process whereby the ends cannot be separated from the means is decidedly congruent with French poststructuralism. Furthermore, his accurate prediction of a 'red bureaucracy' suggests that history is a continuous process and that the ends are inseparable from, and cannot justify, the means. Consequentialism is potentially authoritarian, as in the example of utilitarianism, in which the aim must always be the greatest happiness for the greatest number. Rather, May (1994, 1995) suggests that poststructuralist anarchism advocates a multivalue consequentialism, in which the ends and the means must be the same and in which those ends and means are based on diverse values in particular locations. This basis of ethics is consistent with poststructuralist notion of both social reality and individual identity as being continuously produced. If societies, relationships and individuals are all continuously produced, if history is a continuous process, that ethically is not possible to separate ends from means. As Italian poststructuralist theorist Giorgio Agamben writes, there are only 'means without end' (2000). Unlike Karl Marx or Francis Fukuyama (1992), poststructuralist theorists argue that there can be no 'end of history', whether communist or capitalist.

### **Sexual Orientation as State-form**

The intersections of anarchism and poststructuralism also offer more specific conceptual tools in order to develop an understanding of sexual orientation and a politics able to produce its demise. Here, I turn to Deleuze and Guattari's concepts of the 'nomadic war-machine' and 'state-forms' to explore further the links between critiques of identity politics and of the State incorporating the notion of consent.

Rather than using Rahman's notion of 'institutionalised procedures', I look to Deleuze and Guattari's conception of the State 'as abstract machine rather than institution, instantiated not only at the macropolitical but also at the micropolitical level, reliant upon local practices that sustain it, and offering always the possibility of escape' (May, 1994: 108). Governments, of course, can be understood as concrete institutions. To perceive them as such is to fail to recognise the manner in which macropolitical practices (that produce the appearance of 'institutions') are themselves products of interwoven micropolitical relationships and practices.

Deleuze and Guattari use the notion of state-forms to describe micro and macro level operations that have a relationship of mutual dependence with the State and which serve its goals of control, maintaining the appearance of centralised power. 'The purpose of the state-form is to bind all nomadism to certain structures, to make sure that its creativity does not overflow certain boundaries or certain identificatory categories' (May, 1994: 105). Thus, the state-form helps to fulfil the essential function of the State, which is to conserve, to control, to capture. The State can be understood as 'a process of capture of flows of all kinds, populations, commodities or commerce, money or capital' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987:386). But the State is not able to capture all flows, to control all creativity. Some things escape. These are the creative forces of nomadism: 'not tied to any given social arrangement; they are continuously creative, but their creativity is not naturally bound to any given types or categories of product. Such nomadism is central to Deleuze's thought, because it provides the possibility of conceiving new and different forms of practice, and thus resisting current forms of identification as unwanted constraints' (May, 1994: 104-5).

The mode by which nomadic creativity is controlled Deleuze and Guattari call 'overcoding', which they say 'is the operation that constitutes the essence of the State' (1977:199). 'In overcoding, disparate practices are brought together under a single category or principle, and are given their comprehensibility as variations of that category or principle. What was different becomes merely another mode of the same. In this way, the proliferation of distinct practices produced by nomadic creativity is limited to the creation of a single standard or certain standards by which those practices are judged' (May, 1994: 106). The State functions by overcoding practices, often through codification in law, in order to enable or constrain the continuance of particular practices. Some practices enabled by the State may further serve to constrain or even eliminate other practices. It is at this micropolitical level that the state-forms also operate through overcoding, often through direct or indirect support from State apparatuses.

I suggest that sexual orientation identity can be understood in terms of the state-form. Even before the development of heterosexual and homosexual identities within 'Western' cultures, disciplinary apparatuses, including those of the State and Church, were active in their efforts to define standards for sexual behaviour. The possibility, or rather the perceived possibility, of procreation was sometimes defined as the only justification for sexual pleasure. Indeed, as I mentioned above, heterosexuality was first defined as a mental illness suffered by

those who expressed strong desires for sexual activity with members of 'the other' sex, apart from the respectable necessity of procreation. Heterosexuality developed as a new state-form, one in which a variety of practices were compressed into a single psychiatric category. Homosexuality and bisexuality have been constructed as variations on a theme. Sexual orientation can be understood as a set of state-forms in that a wide variety of practices (including sexual, romantic and gendered) are defined and judged in terms of their capacity to be categorised within, or association with, one of three boxes. Nomadic sexualities (potentially including bisexualities where 'bisexuality' does not become itself become fixed and fixing, where only the state-forms of heterosexuality and homosexuality exist) are rendered incomprehensible at best and deviant at worst. The maintenance of sexual orientation as a comprehensible social category, in the face of much greater sexual diversity, is linked to the State through a wide variety of mechanisms. A comprehensive exploration of this relationship would be a substantial project in and of itself. Obvious examples include marriage, sex education, and clearly discriminatory or anti-discriminatory laws. Other prime examples are found in sexual orientation identity rights movements. Arguments for 'operational essentialism' (Spivak, cited in Butler, 1990), 'strategic essentialism' (Fuss, 1989), or 'necessary fictions' (Weeks 1995), including Gamson's (1996) assertion that sometimes identity politics is the only possible option, come from efforts to be included within the State or to be represented.

## Relationships & Emotions

Any attempt to understand the ongoing production of 'sexual orientation' in everyday life – indeed the ongoing production everyday life itself – must acknowledge the often intense emotionality of the human relationships which produce these phenomena. With regard to the hierarchical production of sexual orientation categories, one emotion in particular is frequently cited by various commentators from academic theorists to pop musicians – shame (e.g., Pet Shop Boys, 1987; Stychin, 2005; Warner, 1999). Clearly, the emotional roots of sexual orientation are a complex rhizomic assemblage (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988) rather than a

singular emotion. Saying that, shame may be considered a key component to this assemblage<sup>3</sup>.

Thomas Scheff, who has written on the role of emotions in the maintenance of social organisation, helps to demonstrate the importance of shame (1990); an argument which can be seen as supportive of the anarchist tradition. The link between shame and anarchism can be seen in the research of Helen Lewis who, sounding like a disciple of Kropotkin<sup>4</sup>, argued that humans have inherent tendencies toward co-operation as social animals. The second part of her argument, in Scheff's words, is 'that shame is the most important of the social emotions because it arises when there is a threat to the social bond. In her scheme, shame has a signal function, alerting one to threats to the bond. Just as feelings of pride signal a secure bond, feelings of shame signal a threatened bond' (p 79-80). Scheff combines Goffman's social analysis of deference with Lewis's psychological one of internal emotions to produce his 'deference-emotion system'. Scheff advocates this as a system for understanding the basis of social bond as emotions, rather than as overt forms of sanction or reward. Compatible with the poststructuralist approach just described, this argument not only provides support for decentralised authority as the basis of social organisation advocated by anarchists, but in fact demonstrates that it already exists. The only minor violation is an essentialist argument that humans are inherently social. This, I suggest, is an unstated presumption of most sociological theory, poststructuralist or otherwise. The sociability of humans is not essentialist in any deterministic sense -- cross-cultural study clearly demonstrates that there are many diverse ways in which to be sociable. Finally, sociability is not essential to humans in a way that differentiates 'us' from other animals as does the humanism of which poststructuralist theorists are so critical.

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3 At this point, one may well expect a turn to the psychoanalytic tradition in order to interrogate intersections of emotions, desires, relationships and social organisation. Those poststructuralist theorists, whose work I argue may be understood as anarchist, have themselves engaged critically, and often productively, with the writings of Freud and Lacan (Butler, 1990, 1993; Deleuze and Guattari, 1977, 1987; Foucault, 1965, 1990). While some have gone so far as to suggest that Lacan himself may be understood as part of the anti-authoritarian left tradition (e.g. Newman, 2001), others argue that Lacan's work is essentially normalising (Robinson, 2005) or reductive. 'For over a decade, I have been sifting through the remnants of psychoanalysis in search of what can be submitted to new theoretical elaborations which avoid, as much as possible, the reductiveness of Freudian and Lacanian formulations' (Guattari, 1998). Rather than turning directly to psychoanalysis myself, I appreciate the sifting labour of others more qualified. The following analysis of the social importance of shame includes Lacan as reworked by Butler, but sharing a scepticism of psychoanalysis with Foucault, Guattari, Robinson and others, the analysis primarily draws on the work of sociologists.

4 Kropotkin (1987 [1902]) is famous for his challenge to social Darwinism, arguing instead that mutual aid, or co-operation, is of far greater importance to biological and social evolution than is competition.

The deference-emotion system draws on the insight of interactionist sociology, particularly Cooley and Goffman, that our understanding of ourselves is based on our ability to see ourselves through others' eyes. A degree of shame is necessary for us to maintain some sense of shared standards, which in turn are necessary for meaningful social relationships. This capacity for self-management, as social beings, depends upon empathy. An anarchist critique must point out that our capacity for empathy is greatly inhibited by systematic competition and hierarchy (Kohn, 1992). It is difficult to imagine how we look through the eyes of others if we see them as objects to be overcome, underlings to command, or authorities to obey. Furthermore, Scheff described how the important role of shame in self-management could become 'pathological', leading to rigid or excessive conformity. To illustrate pathological shame, Scheff returned to Asch's classic social psychology study in which most participants were found to state an opinion concurrent with the rest of a group (who were collaborators presented as participants) despite that opinion being obviously wrong. Asch's qualitative data demonstrates that the decision to go along with the group against one's own beliefs was based either on overt shame or an obsessive bypass shame where participants denied the fact that they were correct and the group was wrong. Even those who resisted conformity felt a sense of shame, but they were not overcome by it.

Scheff's notion of overwhelming pathological shame that demands rigid and excessive conformity provides one basis of support for Deleuze and Guattari's state-form, in particular, and anarchism in general. Indeed, when applied to sexual state-forms, the compatibility of these concepts becomes increasingly obvious. Michael Warner (1999) opens his thesis on the relationships between representation, sexual shame and ethics by drawing similar connections.

Sooner or later, happily or unhappily, almost everyone fails to control his or her sex life. Perhaps as compensation, almost everyone sooner or later also succumbs to temptation to control *someone else's* sex life. Most people cannot quite rid themselves of the sense that controlling the sex of others, far from being unethical, is where morality begins. Shouldn't it be possible to allow everyone sexual autonomy, in a way consistent with everyone else's sexual autonomy? As simple as this ethical principle sounds, we have not come close to bringing it into practice (p1, original emphasis).

Of course, if we reject the dichotomy of sexuality/society (see e.g. Weeks, 1985), that is to say

that like 'society', 'sexuality' is an effect of social relationships, this statement may be understood as a call for anarchy. Everyone should be allowed autonomy in a way consistent with everyone else's autonomy. According to Scheff and Warner, pathological shame encourages us to try to control ourselves and others. These efforts to control depend upon representation -- fitting people, relationships and desires into boxes and judging them in terms of those boxes. In terms of sex, this results in what Warner refers to as 'hierarchies of shame' (p 195) or what Rubin called 'the sexual hierarchy' (1992: 282).

Scheff acknowledges that while shame may be a biological aspect of humanity, pathological shame is certainly a product of social conditions: 'adult shame is doubly social: shame arises in social monitoring of the self, and shame itself often becomes a further source of shame, *depending upon the particular situation and the normative structure of the culture*' (Scheff, 1990: 84, my emphasis). Hierarchies, I suggest, are the key 'structure' that enable shame to develop into pathological shame. Shame can only become a further source of shame if emotions are something to be ashamed of. If, as Scheff and Lewis have argued, shame is the direct consequence of damaging social bonds, then hierarchies, which are based on the continual damage of social bonds through domination must reject shame in order to exist. The hierarchy of the rational over the emotional is necessary to reject shame; it is also often tied to hierarchies of masculinity over femininity. This supports feminist critiques of authoritarianism, in general, and bureaucracy (Byington et al, 1991; Charles, 2000; Collins et al, 1989; Daly, 1988; Ferguson, 1984; Matthews, 1994; Reinelt, 1994; Stedward, 1987) and the State (Brown, 1995; Elshtain, 1981) in particular, as masculine. Furthermore, as the hierarchy of normative heterosexualities over other sexual possibilities provides crucial support to the ongoing production of masculinity and femininity as a hierarchical binary (see e.g., Butler, 1990, 1993; Connell, 1995a, 1995b; Rich, 1999 [1979]), it should be unsurprising that sexuality is an area rich in pathological shame. Finally, the dominance of discourses which privatise inequality (Brown, 1995) means that oppression results in shame on the part of the oppressed (see Bartky, 1990, especially Chapter 6).

Focusing on sexual orientation identity more specifically, rejection of difficult feelings, including shame, is integral to the continuous production of the hetero/homo division. Judith Butler's psychoanalytic analysis of heterosexual identity is consistent with Scheff's notion of shame.

there is a linkage between homosexuality and abjection, indeed, a possible identification *with* an abject homosexuality at the heart of heterosexual identification. This economy of repudiation suggests that heterosexuality and homosexuality are mutually exclusive phenomena, that they can only be made to coincide through rendering the one culturally viable and the other a transient and imaginary affair. The abjection of homosexuality can take place only through identification with that abjection, an identification that must be disavowed, an identification that one fears to make only because one has already made it, an identification that institutes that abjection and sustains it (1993:111-112).

In Scheff's terms, then, the feeling of abjection toward homosexuality produces an initial feeling of shame, and if heterosexual identity depends upon feeling ashamed of the shame of one's identification with abject homosexuality, then pathological shame must result. Indeed, such an answer might provide a better understanding for the care that many people take in order to prevent being thought of as non-heterosexual, even in social contexts where same-sex desire is openly accepted, or perhaps even applauded as radical or transgressive. This rejection is not limited to heterosexuality, however. Butler further argues that an exclusionary homosexual identity, which is 'a political necessity to *specify* gay and lesbian identity over and against its sensible opposite, heterosexuality' (p 113), denies the interdependence of heterosexual and homosexual identities.

Moreover, a full-scale denial of that interrelationship can constitute a rejection of heterosexuality that is to some degree an identification *with* a rejected heterosexuality. Important to this economy, however, is the refusal to recognise this identification that is, as it were, already made, the refusal which absently designates the domain of a specifically gay melancholia, a loss which cannot be recognised and, hence, cannot be mourned. For gay or lesbian identity-position to sustain its appearance as coherent, heterosexuality must remain in that rejected and repudiated place. Paradoxically, its heterosexual *remains* must be *sustained* precisely through the insistence on seamless coherence of a specifically gay identity (1993:112).

Thus, homosexual identity also depends upon pathological shame, in its failure to acknowledge its rejection of heterosexuality. Even worse, the pathological shame of homosexual identity and that of heterosexual identity are mutually sustaining and mutually dependent. And, of course, those who claim gendered sexual identities other than heterosexual or homosexual (e.g., bisexual) are likely to be encouraged to reject both heterosexual and homosexual identities by the strength of the hetero/homo division. This multiple rejection

provides further opportunities for pathological shame. The state-form of sexual orientation is maintained not simply through interpersonal relations of power, but also through intrapersonal (yet still social) emotional states.

Pathological shame in general, and sexuality in particular, must be addressed for anarchist politics to be both effective and consistent. At the same time, the constraining effect of non-pathological shame is crucial for recognising human beings' capacity for organisation without domination -- anarchy. One could interpret Scheff and Lewis's arguments as consistent with so many anarchist ones: namely, that it is not laws that discourage us from harming one another physically or emotionally, but shame. While 'law and order' depend on our fear of shame, resulting in pathological shame, anarchy requires acceptance of all emotions including shame. Failure to accept shame supports the ongoing production of domination and conformity. This can be seen clearly in the relationship between pathological shame and sexual hierarchies and anxieties (Rubin, 1992; Warner, 1995).

## **Conclusion: Toward Nomadic Alternatives**

Sexual orientation, as a state-form, functions to bind diverse sexual desires and practices into particular categories with their own rules. Heterosexuality, homosexuality and bisexuality are the main categories, each of which are defined within local contexts interdependent with other social characteristics such as sexual, religious, racialised, economic and gendered constructions. The realm of sexuality, as with any other social practices, involves its own forms of nomadic creativity. Nomadism, I suggest, provides a conceptual tool which incorporates the strengths of queer, while improving upon its limitations. Although, as I have suggested above, making explicit the anarchism of queer politics addresses many of the criticisms that have been brought to it, the term queer itself comes with some baggage which is difficult to escape: the connotations of homosexuality and of transgression. Placing homosexuality at the centre of a politics aiming to eliminate the concept of sexual orientation is potentially problematic. While prefigurative politics are potentially transgressive, transgression is not always prefigurative. My project could easily be understood as a kind of queer anarchism, but I prefer to formulate it as an anarchism which places relationships and ethics at the centre of its definition. In poststructuralist terms, both subjectivities and macro level social organisation are produced through relationships. An anarchist poststructuralist ethic of relationships rejects representation and the conditions which result in pathological



shame, but instead promotes respect for diversity and acknowledges life – political, personal and biological -- as an ongoing process. This approach incorporates what might be referred to as 'sexuality' without emphasising the sexual as more open to fluidity (or nomadism) than other aspects of relationships, as queer sometimes does (Martin, 1994). An emphasis on relationships also emphasises the feminist heritage of my politics, in particular questioning a neat separation between the personal and the political. Finally, it was, in large part, through research on relationships that I came to develop this (relational) anarchist politics of sexual orientation. The next chapter offers a story of how this research project and these political ideas developed.



## Chapter Four

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### Intimacy with Strangers: Notes on Methodology

*It is not enough for a handful of experts to attempt the solution of a problem, to solve it and then to apply it. The restriction of knowledge to an elite group destroys the spirit of society and leads to its intellectual impoverishment.*

-- Albert Einstein

*The collective matrix of a science at a given time is determined by a kind of establishment, which includes universities, learned societies, and, more recently, the editorial offices of technical journals. Like other establishments, they are consciously or unconsciously bent on preserving the status quo -- partly because unorthodox innovations are a threat to their authority, but also because of the deeper fear that their laboriously erected intellectual edifice might collapse under the impact.*

-- Arthur Koestler

As I set out in the introduction of this thesis, the aims of this research project have been 1) to better understand this concept we call 'sexual orientation' by understanding how (some) people live in relation to it and 2) what these understandings can tell us about possibilities for political activism. I decided to focus on the experiences of people in 'mixed sexual orientation identity relationships' (hereafter referred to as mixed relationships) for a number of reasons. I left it up to people to define for themselves whether their relationships were 'mixed'. Here is the text from the web site I used for recruiting participants (<http://sexualorientation.info>):

I am interested in the diversity of people's experiences, so my definition is broad. You would qualify for inclusion in this research project if you are in an ongoing romantic and/or sexual relationship where **the way in which you identify your sexual orientation, either now or in the past, is different from that of a current partner**. Sexual orientation identities do

not have to be limited to traditional categories like bisexual, gay/lesbian and heterosexual. They can be much more diverse.

As the historical debates I described earlier highlight, difference is a crucial issue in the politics of sexuality. 'Mixed' relationships struck me as a particularly interesting place to explore issues of difference. Most obviously, these relationships cross borders of 'sexual orientation'. Difference is an important issue in these relationships. Second, this criterion allows for the inclusion of a diverse range of relationships with 'sexual orientation' identity. I was not interested in looking at heterosexuality, homosexuality or bisexuality, as much previous research has done, but at 'sexual orientation' more generally. These explorations of difference, I expected, would be useful for addressing the three aims of this research project. For many people, 'sexual orientation' is taken for granted as a natural truth. Although I suspect that no one's life really fits entirely in these boxes, the lack of open discussion and questioning of this is the effect of the ubiquity of the hetero/homo division within 'Western' social organisation. Of course, these effects are not determinist, and many people, in many situations, question the reality of 'sexual orientation'. I expected that 'mixed' relationships would be one situation that would encourage both questioning and the capacity to openly discuss this question with a stranger (me). Such perspectives, I thought, would be useful for understanding how sexual orientation is produced, how people experience it, and how the resulting oppression can be addressed politically.

I was inspired by other work on relationships that cross the borders of loaded social categories. One research project on white birthmothers of African descent children in Britain (Winddance Twine, 1999), found that these women became very active anti-racist educators because of their relationship with their children. Indeed, their capacity for anti-racism challenges the assumptions of members of the black community who assumed that understanding of racism depended upon a particular racial experience. These white women lacked such experience and thus were expected to be incapable of preparing children to deal with racism. According to the researcher, however, these women were very effective in their efforts. Similarly, Kandiyoti (1994, cited in New, 2001) suggests that Muslim men who support anti-purdah arguments do so because of the importance of their relationships with their mothers. Finally, Nestle (1983), a lesbian and feminist identified woman wrote a passionate defence of women's rights to enjoy sex with men. Her challenge to the arguments of lesbian feminists, such as Andrea Dworkin, are based on the mutual understanding she

developed with her mother around issues of sexuality. Although at one point she hoped her mother would abandon the men who often abused her and choose lesbianism, Nestle came to accept her mother's decisions. 'We faced each other as two women for whom sex was important and after initial skirmishes, she accepted my world of adventure as I did hers' (p 470). She concludes her essay with an image of her mother responding to Andrea Dworkin: 'Don't scream penis at me but help to change the world so no woman feels shame or fear because she likes to fuck' (ibid). Close personal relationships appear to highlight the possibility of escaping politics defined by 'identity' or 'experience'.

I was also interested in talking to people about 'mixed' relationships because so many of my own relationships and those of many of my friends have crossed these borders. I talk about my own experience a bit later on. First, I think this fact in itself says something interesting about social change. Historically, I imagine that the majority of 'mixed' relationships of this nature were marriages involving individuals not open with their partners about their same-sex desires. Further research would of course be necessary to address the viability of this assumption. However, I believe it is fair to say that it would be difficult to imagine a research project like this one taking place twenty years ago. Popular understanding of sexual desire certainly has changed, perhaps in part due to the cultural shift described by Roseneil (2002). Films such as *Chasing Amy* and the occasional television programme (e.g. Channel Four's *Bob & Rose*) acknowledge the possibility of mixed relationships, between a heterosexual-identified man and a lesbian-identified woman, and between a gay-identified man and a heterosexual-identified woman, respectively. Both *Chasing Amy* and *Bob & Rose* also demonstrated the risks attached, including being labelled a 'sexual orientation traitor'.

These issues are also discussed in the popular media. The cover story of one issue of *Marie Claire* (UK edition) is advertised as '*I was gay, but now I'm married with a kid*' *One woman's story*. The story in fact addresses a mixed relationship (bi-woman, straight-man) and other stories of changes in peoples sexual desires and identities (Maguire 2001). Finally, in a Guardian Weekend magazine article entitled 'My Crime against the Lesbian State', comedian Jackie Clune wrote about becoming lesbian and how she 'achieved gayness for 12 years, and [how] most of the time it was wonderful' (p 26). At the same time, she had real problems with 'Lesbian Police' promoting a very particular idea of lesbianism. When she decided to go straight again, this policing (representation) intensified, including being labelled 'Most Disappointing Lesbian of the Year' in a lesbian magazine (p 29). The question of the

relationship between current developments in capitalism and the so-called 'transformation of intimacy' have already been addressed in the previous chapter. Setting this aside for the moment, the presentation of such relationships in the media is interesting. If nothing else, it has been significant in the development of this research project and analysis.

Finally, the focus on mixed identity relationships is part of a long sociological tradition of examining the 'unusual' in order to better understand the 'usual'. As I mentioned above, I expected these individuals to be likely to question the truth regime of sexual orientation. Although I did not make the connection when I first chose to focus on mixed identity relationships, the experience of questioning truth regimes and producing one's own understandings of reality, one's own values within relationships, is very much like the experience of anarchism. On the nonhierarchically organised women's peace camp at Greenham Common, Sasha Roseneil wrote,

There was no ethical framework readily available to tell them how they should live together and how they should confront the threat of nuclear war. [...] Women at Greenham had to invent their own set of values to guide their actions. [...] Greenham was a *liminal* space, a created world where many of the rules and values of the rest of society were consciously questioned, reworked, transformed or discarded in favour of a new set of beliefs (2000: 114-115).

Roseneil suggested that the Greenham experience was in many ways part of living in an 'uncertain postmodern world, where tradition has less and less hold over us, [and] we are increasingly forced to create our own codes for living' (p 114). According to this, then, one might also suggest that mixed relationships are a very postmodern phenomena. Indeed, the recent rise in cultural representation of mixed relationships might support this argument. However, I am sceptical of arguments that suggest that tradition is a thing of the past and that now we can create our own values (see Chapter Two). Rather, the argument of the previous chapter is that we all make it up as we go along, regardless of time or space. Some just have the 'benefit' of imagining that they are not -- that they are following essential truths or unquestionable traditions. Like the women at Greenham Common, people in mixed relationships do not have that 'benefit'. They may experience a degree of freedom that is exceptional in the contemporary world rather than definitive of postmodernity. But, is not the existence of mixed relationships proof of the decreasing hold of that tradition? Graeber makes a similar comparison to race and class in challenging the division between a (post)modern

world and a premodern societies.

One might object that there is a lot of interracial marriage going on, and even more interracial sex, but then, this is only what we should expect. Statistical studies always reveal that, even in 'traditional' societies like the Nambikwara or Arapesh, at least 5-10% of young people marry someone they're not supposed to. Statistically, the phenomena are of about equal significance. Social class is slightly more complicated, since the groups are less clearly bounded. Still, the difference between a ruling class and a collection of people who happen to have done well is, precisely, kinship: the ability to marry one's children off appropriately and pass one's advantages on to one's descendants. People marry across class lines too, but rarely very far (Graeber, 2004:52).

If the increasing visibility of mixed relationships is not support for the existence of a postmodern reality for those of us in the overdeveloped world, in what way does this study of the 'unusual' tell us about the 'usual'?

Like Greenham Common and other anarchic spaces, the experiences of people in mixed identity relationships highlights how carefully controlled, how traditional, everyday life is. Their 'unusual' experiences of negotiating the borders of sexual orientation highlight the extent of representation that everyone undergoes, demonstrating the brutality of policing around sexual orientation. At the same time, participants' diverse practices of resistance to sexual orientation may be more active, more coherent, more open and more comfortable than those practised by many other people, but as no one is entirely capable of constantly living up to the gendered and sexualised standards of sexual orientation, resistance must also be ubiquitous. Finally, the factors that support and enable these individuals to resist orientation should be applicable in broad terms to other people's lives. The validity of these assumptions has been tested throughout the process in my own practices of sexual health education and political activism (see below).

## **Recruitment & Diversity**

Despite this media attention, mixed relationships are not highly visible in Britain. There are no mixed relationship bars, clubs, saunas, magazines and few networks, which provide the recruitment arenas for research on same-sex relationships. Likewise, such relationships do not have the ubiquity of heterosexuality, which is increasingly being studied

in a wide variety of contexts. In order to recruit participants, I relied in part upon personal contacts and snowballing. The internet was also a valuable recruiting tool. I developed a web site to provide information about the research project to prospective participants ([sexualorientation.info](http://sexualorientation.info)). I then advertised this site in gay and lesbian magazines, bisexual newsletters and email lists focused on a variety of identities, desires and experiences (e.g., married bisexual men, LGBT spirituality and religion, ethnic identities, straight spouses of LGBT people, bi women in relationships with men, SM, polyamoury, radical queers, bi, etc.). Some of the participants knew each other through pre-existing relationships (four participants comprised two couples; two were involved in the same anarchist networks) and I had a significant degree of knowledge with six of them prior to the research<sup>5</sup>. In total, I was able to complete 16 in-depth interviews (see Appendix IV for a participant list).

The non-existence of mixed relationship identity had implications for diversity. Importantly, it allowed for a wider range of sexual identities (and non-identities) than research on 'sexual orientation' that focuses on heterosexuality, homosexuality or bisexuality. This diversity was most pronounced among people who might be understood as non-heterosexual; only a quarter of the participants identified their sexual desires as predominantly other-sex oriented. Many of the 'same-sex desiring' participants had 'straight identified' partners who were not interested in participating in the interviews. I did not ask in-depth questions as to why partners were not interested in the interviews as I felt this would come across as a coercive efforts to encourage participation. It seems clear, though, that 'sexual orientation' tends to be associated with same-sex desire rather than 'heterosexuality'. Among 'same-sex desiring' participants, however, there was a great deal of diversity in terms of gendered desire, sexual practice and relationship patterns.

In terms of 'race' and nationality, each member of the group identified as 'white' and all had come from the overdeveloped world; seven were born outside of the UK and English was a second language for four of them. Although 'class' varied in terms of income, job status and parental status, none of the participants could be considered deprived in terms of 'cultural capital'. Politically, all of the participants could be described as 'left-wing' with a minority being 'politically active', including three involved in anarchist politics. Apart from two men

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5 Four were people I considered friends, one was the partner of a friend and another I met often through professional networks. Two others asked to be interviewed after finding out about my research when we first met (in contexts varying from the professional to the pub).



living in towns, all of the participants lived in large urban areas in either England or Scotland. Participants ranged in age from mid-20s to late-60s, with an average of 35. Techniques for increasing diversity (i.e., snowballing and friendship networks) utilised in large scale funded projects on same-sex relationships and desire (Dunne 1997, Heaphy et al 1998, McWhirter and Mattison 1984, and Weston 1991), were valuable, but less successful for smaller scale research on a non-established identity. Furthermore, theoretic sampling (Heaphy et al., 1998; Holland et al., 1994; Weston, 1991) depends upon a wealth of potential respondents from which one can select individuals from various social positions. This was a wealth I did not have. I only turned away a handful of individuals who lived in locations that I could not afford to travel to for a single interview and one man who wanted an opportunity to talk about difficulties in his relationship -- a service I was not willing to provide. As the aim of the research has not been to represent the experience of people in mixed relationships based on a representative 'sample', no particular forms of diversity were required.

## **Interview data**

After deciding to interview people in 'mixed relationships', I organised a small, informal focus group of friends and colleagues who I felt would have valuable insights. While the discussion also touched on issues including personal safety and the benefit of acquiring a mobile phone, its main function was to simulate my thoughts on interview participants. From this meeting, I developed an initial interview schedule and began interviewing participants.

The data production process was characterised by staples of qualitative research generally credited to grounded theory, an approach developed a Chicago school symbolic interactionism by Anselm Strauss and others (e.g. Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss and Corbin, 1998).

Grounded theory is a *general methodology* for developing theory that is grounded in data systematically gathered and analysed. Theory evolves during actual research, and it does this through continuous interplay between analysis and data collection. (Strauss and Corbin, 1994, p273)

In keeping with this tradition, I modified the interview schedule over the course of the interviews (see examples in Appendices I, II and III).

Interviews, which lasted between one and a half and four and half hours, were tape recorded and transcribed by a professional transcriber. Transcriptions were straightforward textual representations of speech including elipses to indicate pause, italics to indicate emphasis through tone, all-caps to indicate louder voice and brackets to indicate non-verbal communicative sounds (e.g., [laughs]). During interviews, data was produced rather than collected. As feminist research debates have come to conclude, 'the research interview is not a clear window onto the interviewee's experience, rather it is the joint production of an account by interviewer and interviewee through the dynamic interaction between them' (Alldred and Gillies, 2002:146). The production of data was, by and large, an enjoyable experience. I was able to develop a genuine sense of connection with each of the participants and felt privileged to be trusted with their stories. Many the interviews were also, at times, very emotionally demanding as participants described experiences of violence and shame. (I return to the experience of interviewing in 'Ethics' below.)

Distinguishing between data production and analysis is difficult, as the interview situation involves both (see e.g., Miles and Huberman, 1994). In the more formal analytic stage, I began to read the transcripts and made corrections while listening to the tapes. Initially, I coded interviews using coloured pencils. Based on careful and repeated readings of the transcripts (and influenced by a collection of factors described below), I began to divide selections from the transcripts into three headings from which I expected to develop chapters: policing, resistance and empowerment. My coding technique shifted. On one office wall, I placed the three chapter headings. I then developed some headings according to my reading of the transcripts. I highlighted sections of the transcripts and coded them with a number. The interviewee's pseudonym and the number were written on a post-it note along with a brief description of the transcript selection. Post-it notes were added to the wall near appropriate subheadings. This approach gave me an overview of the potential for this analytic system. After completing four of the transcripts using this method, I had filled my wall (see Figure 1). I was also reasonably confident that developing an analysis based on the divisions of policing, resistance and empowerment was consistent with the stories I had been told. I transferred my analytic system from the wall to, ironically enough, a set of pigeonholes, three across and seven down (see Figure 2). Now that I was confident this system was consistent with the data, I began cutting up the transcripts, placing segments in appropriate pigeonholes (see Figure 3).



Figure 1: Office Wall as Data Analysis Tool

While this approach is in many ways similar to that utilised by various software packages, my experience of these packages is that it is difficult to maintain a focus on the 'big picture' and on the elements of analysis simultaneously. Finally, as the analysis developed I needed the flexibility to recode data. With my system, this was easily done by shuffling pieces of paper around. When it came to the final stages of analysis, that is writing, pieces of paper repeatedly shifted categories. Furthermore, referring back to interview transcripts to extract the coded text often resulted in extracting a different segment from the original scissors-job. Overall, I feel that my data analysis method allowed a much greater flexibility and a more 'playful' (Lofland and Lofland, 1985) approach to the data than that allowed through the use of qualitative data analysis software.



Figure 2: Pigeonholes as Data Analysis Tool<sup>6</sup>

One of the most difficult aspects of the analytical writing was choosing which stories to exclude. Each individual's thoughts and experiences were valuable contributions and each of the 16 people had many emotionally powerful and theoretically interesting stories to tell. Limiting chapter length while including sufficient detail from narratives required reducing the number of analytic categories explored in each chapter. (See Figure 3). I could easily have written up an entire PhD thesis from the resistance data alone. Analysis, then, also depended upon selecting analytic categories to make up chapters subsections and then selecting quotations that work together with the other theoretical elements to produce an analytical narrative. Quotations also shifted from categories that ended up being discarded for being too specific (e.g., Policing:Partner). I also selected two interviews (Mark and Erica) for more in-

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6 Photograph taken while the Empowerment data was being analysed.

depth exploration in Chapter Five, allowing the opportunity to explore detail both within and across narratives. In all cases, and especially in Chapter Five, I was careful not to produce linear narratives characteristic of the modern subject (Alldred and Gillies, 2002), but attempted to demonstrate the contradictions, complexities and chaos (that is, non-linearity) of participants' lives.

<i><b>Policing</b></i>		<i><b>Resistance</b></i>		<i><b>Empowerment</b></i>	
Presentation of self for gay cause	Sexual Orientation identity labels	Labels		Alternative Discourses	
Sexual Violence	Shame/Fear	Attraction/ Desire	Doing heterosexuality differently	Partner	
Family	Partner	Family	Relationships	Other Relationships	
Lesbian Sex Police	Gender	Gender	Gender & Desire	Communicative Ethic	Sharing desires Joint cruising
Marriage	Sex/Desire	Nomadism in policed states	Sex	Questioning	Sexual Practice
Capitalism	Monogamy	Monogamy	Explicitly Challenging Policing	Nomadic Groups/Spaces	Experience
Invisibility/ Impossibility	Teasing	Autonomous Boundaries	Misc Nomadisms	Urban	Not British

Figure 3: Analytical Categories: A Map of the Pigeonhole System

While this research project has been data-driven, theory cannot be understood to grow from an empirical centre like the tree from the ground. In my experience of research, theory and data are not easily divided. Mark's story, characterised by a sharp contrast between relationships of domination and empowering relationships based on mutual aid, first encouraged me to consider anarchist theory. But, were it not for my involvement in anarchist politics, it is unlikely I would have turned to this 'subjugated knowledge' (Foucault, 1980), to help me understand intimate relationships. While Strauss and Corbin (1994) resist the caricature of grounded theory as springing forth from data by emphasising the necessity of drawing on experience and theoretical work where appropriate, it is important to recognise the complexities of the sections of experience, theory and data. For this, I found in Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the *rhizome* invaluable.

## Theorising Data

Crucial to Deleuze and Guattari's project of the anarchist alternative to "State philosophy" [, which] is another word for the representational thinking that has characterised Western metaphysics since Plato' (Massumi 1988: xi), is the advocacy of rhizomic rather than arboreal understanding. The tree, they suggest, is the model upon which representational philosophy is based. It has a central trunk from which stem binary divisions of branch and root. The existence of a centre imposes both unity and hierarchy. Each branch and root is unified by the trunk, and each is defined in terms of its position relation to the centre. Rhizomic thought is Deleuze and Guattari's alternative to centralised and hierarchical trees. Unlike the tree with its trunk, the rhizome has no centre. 'Any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be. This is very different from the tree or root, which plots a point, fixes an order' (p 7). Without a centre, the rhizome lacks the determinism of hierarchical arborescence: there is no correct order. Furthermore, the centreless multiplicity of the rhizome contrasts sharply with the singular unity of the tree. Defying the dichotomy of subject/object, the multiplicity is the effect of relationships themselves (or, in Deleuze and Guattari's terms, an assemblage of lines). 'Puppet strings, as a rhizome or multiplicity, are tied not to the supposed will of an artist or puppeteer but to a multiplicity of nerve fibres, which form another puppet in other dimensions connected to the first' (p8). In other words, Deleuze and Guattari reject the notion of the independent subject, but see the 'individual' as a multiplicity interconnected with other multiplicities. Importantly, a rhizome is also nomadic, and 'never allows itself to be overcoded' (p 9).

I have found the rhizome to be valuable in helping me understand how to describe my experience of 'methodology'. I have continuously felt that I am doing something wrong. I have a background in the very arboreal disciplines of chemistry and psychology. Since then, I have also heard from various sociologists that my work is 'too political', that I should have known exactly what I was looking for when I interviewed people, or that I should develop an analysis by 'listening to my data'. My experience of research, however, has been far more rhizomic than this.

Queer, anarchist and feminist theories must challenge the binary thinking that underlies social divisions (Anthias, 1998) if they are to overcome the various hierarchies they

oppose. This includes a false dichotomy of *theory* and popular thought.

There is an old -- and I believe convincing -- argument that most of us theorise a fair amount of the time as we go about the business of living our lives, whether that living involves writing books or painting houses or changing bedpans. We ask how and why the world works as it works, why it does or doesn't change. [...] It should not be such a daunting task, for instance, to integrate materials from anecdotes and interviews and everyday life with theoretical encounters of the footnoted kind. The point is not to treat street theorising as 'raw data' that remains TBE -- to be explained -- but to approach street theorising as a well spring of explanatory devices and rhetorical strategies in its own right (Weston, 1998: 144-145).

Weston challenges the arboreal logic of grounded theory that depends upon the dichotomy between theory and data. In this research project, interviewees' narratives have initiated to the theoretical development of this work, not simply as illustrations of high theory, but often as theoretically sophisticated themselves. Indeed, after interviewing Erica, whose story along with Mark's is explored in Chapter Five, I was increasingly convinced the benefit of an anarchist analysis, as she has developed a convincing argument along these lines in terms of her own experience.

Also, long before I began to understand the works of Butler and Foucault, I was heavily influenced by much more accessible theory. Libertarian, sex-positive women writers have influenced my thinking on gender, sexuality and politics since I first encountered pornography as a teenager. As the advice columnist for *Penthouse Magazine* and author of *The Happy Hooker*, Xaviera Hollander is hardly likely to be considered a theorist to be cited in serious scholarly work. But what is the political impact of maintaining a silence on her influence. bell hooks has voiced her concern.

Work by women of colour and marginalised groups or white women (for example, lesbians, sex radicals), especially if written in a manner that renders it accessible to a broader reading public, is often de-legitimised in academic settings, even if that work enables and promotes feminist practice. Though such work is often appropriated by the very individuals setting restrictive critical standards, it is this work that they most often claim is not really theory. Clearly, one of the uses these individuals make of theory is instrumental. They use it to set up unnecessary and competing hierarchies of thought which reinscribe the politics of domination by designating work as either inferior, superior, or more or less worthy of attention (hooks, 1994: 63-64).

Although thoroughly capitalist, Xaviera Hollander's column supported and encouraged people to explore a wide variety of sexual desires and practices without regard to the rules of 'sexual orientation'. Indeed, some pornographic writing provides a space in which the relationship between gender and desire is often very complex. Just as gay pornography has been crucial for many men resisting compulsory heterosexuality (Preston, 1993), so too has pornographic nomadism influenced my own theorising. Other, less stigmatised but still clearly non-academic forms of cultural production have also influenced the theoretical development of this research. In particular, the anarcha-feminist science-fiction writings of Ursula LeGuin (1999 [1974], 2001), Starhawk (1993, 1997) and Marge Piercy (2000 [1976], 1991) present inspiring alternative realities where relationships of gender, sexuality and authority are radically different. So too has the music of politically engaged songwriters, too numerous to mention, pieces of queer, anarchist and feminist propaganda in the forms of zines, leaflets and web sites, conversations and other miscellaneous pieces of theory that have passed through my head without necessarily having been carefully documented and cited as 'theory'. Rather than confessing poor scholarship on my part, I mention these examples to acknowledge, in hindsight, the debts that my theory owes to the labour of many people whose theoretical labour will perhaps not be granted the same social status that mine may be as 'academic' work.

Another a significant false dichotomy is the division between theory and practice. To theorise *is* a social practice. Like any other practice, theory has implications for reality -- whether that be to challenge or to produce relationships of domination (or, as often is the case, both simultaneously). Likewise, the sharing of theory -- through writing or more interactive forms of education -- can also be a practice of freedom or a practice of domination (hooks, 1994). Other forms of social practice necessarily involve theory -- the everyday practice of understanding what one's actions mean and why one does them. The 'theorising' that shapes this project is not all inspired by the writings of 'philosophers' and 'pornographers', by the thoughts and feelings of the participants, but also by my own participation in various social practices including intimate relationships, teaching sex education, and political activism. Each of these is examined in-depth below.

As I argued in the previous chapter, anarchy is not simply chaos, but, like all of life, it does depend upon chaotic forces. All of social life is both stable and fluid at the same time. Is this analysis science or art? I must say no to this dichotomy. Like life, it includes stability and



fluidity, rigour and chaos, science and art. I will not attempt to convert this anarchic, rhizomic process into a linear narrative. To do so would give an unrealistic description of my experience, as well as contradicting my critique of representation, singularity, linearity: of the State. This thesis instead is a nomadic fiction. Through most of it, I have constructed stories. If you're reading this in order, you will already have read stories of the anarchism, of feminist sex wars, of gay liberation, gay pride and queer resistance. The next chapters includes stories of policing, resistance and empowerment. There are also stories of violence and shame, of negotiating boundaries and of the importance of relationships. Here, I offer a selection of short stories, each of which attempts to offer a flavour of the rhizomic elements from which this thesis grows. These stories are, of course, interconnected in more ways than I can describe. Furthermore, they do not provide the 'truth.' I do not remember all of the elements that make up this rhizome, and I may never have been aware of many of them. Finally, I retain my freedom to set boundaries; many of the stories I could tell here, I choose to keep to myself or share only with particular people in particular situations. As a multiplicity, a rhizome cannot be divided into individual singularities. Instead, the following stories offer one way of describing the rhizome; in this case I describe six aspects: ethics, sex education, activism, identity, emotion, and relationships.

### Ethics in practice

Social researchers are increasingly concerned with issues of ethics in the research process. Of particular concern is the relationship between researcher and the researched. Qualitative interviews, particularly those focusing on sensitive issues (Lee, 1993), depend upon a high degree of intimacy and trust, and therefore a high degree of vulnerability on the part of research participants. In the previous chapter, I described anarchist ethics as based on multi-value consequentialism (i.e., ends and means are inseparable and involve multiple forms of 'good'), anti-representationalism (i.e., telling people who they are or how they should live), mutual aid and voluntary association. I attempted to apply these ethics to the research process.

In practice, voluntary association is the first issue to arise as individuals choose whether or not they wish to participate in the research project and, more specifically, in an interview with me on the issues of sexuality, identity and relationships. To attempt to ensure that association was voluntary, involving informed and active consent, prospective participants were encouraged to read details of the project from my web site. The one

participant who do not have internet access was posted a paper copy in advance of the interview. Participants were also asked to read and sign a letter after the interview was complete if they were happy for the material to be used in the project.

Like other researchers exploring issues of sexual orientation identity (e.g. Dunne 1997; Heaphy et al 1998), I found the participants to be very keen to share their stories with me. Throughout all the interviews, with one exception, the participants seemed to feel very comfortable with the experience and therefore 'consenting'. Meg, for example, described her experience of the interview and why she had agreed to participate.

Oh, to have a chance to talk about myself and my relationships and think about them. I've enjoyed the prompt to think about them and perhaps the prompt of seeing it through somebody else's eyes or seeing how it sounds to somebody else or ... and that, being happy to articulate again what and why. [...] and also because you seem a sympathetic person who I already feel like there's not any of the threats or dangers. I'm not having to make a point to you. [...] you don't feel demanding.

Because the material was on such a sensitive subject, I aimed to be not demanding. In only one interview did I have concerns about someone's choice to participate. Phyllis seemed more anxious in the interview than any of the other participants. One of these reasons was because she had chosen to participate in the interview without telling her partner that she was going to do so. When I asked her why she had not, she replied

Phyllis: It's a good question. I think he's quite private and I think he wouldn't necessarily like me talking about my relationship, with him, with somebody else and I suppose because I'm talking about things that I haven't worked out myself, and he might be jealous in a way that I should be doing that with him and so there's probably an exclusion thing as well, I think, that perhaps in a way it's almost the most in-your-face thing that I would have done since I've been seeing him. He's extremely understanding and open-minded but I think it's the exclusion thing rather than the not understanding why I would want to do it thing that might ... he might find difficult.

Jamie: Do you think you will tell him that you've done the interview?

Phyllis: I'm thinking about it. I'm thinking about it. [...] So I might tell him but I think it would be better to tell him when I'm with him rather than the long-distance stuff. You have to be really careful.

[...]

Jamie: And how do you feel now? How have you felt during the interview?

Phyllis: Well I suppose quite emotional in some ways, quite uptight. No, not uptight, that's wrong.

Jamie: Anxious or ...?

Phyllis: No, not even anxious just ... I don't know how to describe it. Heightened emotions, I suppose, in some ways. I very rarely talk like this about myself. I tend not to be talking about myself most of the time so it is quite weird to do that [...]. Yeah, slightly scary. Perhaps scary is the right word because I knew there were certain questions that were going to come up and I was thinking 'what am I going to say?' [...] No, I think I've got through it.

I left Phyllis's house distinctly uncomfortable. Had I been ethically obligated to ensure that her partner and also given informed consent? Phyllis expressed a strong desire throughout the interview to have the opportunity to explore the issues we were discussing, but uncomfortable telling her partner that she wanted to do this. Had I participated in some sort of research equivalent of infidelity? Or had I provided a valuable opportunity for Phyllis to talk? Or both?

While I have no answers to those questions, the situation also brings up another issue that seems to be lacking in the literature on research ethics: care of the self on the part of the researcher. I left Phyllis's house with a sense of shame, because I felt as though perhaps a number of social bonds had been damaged. How would this affect her relationship with her partner? Was she really okay? Was there anything else I could have done differently? At the same time, I experienced pathological shame. I felt that as a social researcher, I should have somehow been stronger and more capable. In part, I had internalised the rational ideal of the university and of academic practice (see Game and Metcalfe, 1996; hooks, 1994). Also, Phyllis's anxieties and shame about sex and sexuality, like that of all of the participants, resonated with my own experiences. In order to fulfil the ideals of ethical practice, the researcher must not so much be skilled at the emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983) that characterises the instrumental approach of 'doing rapport' (Oakley, 1981, Duncombe and Jessop, 2002), but rather have an emotional capacity to create a comfortable environment for the participants and to deal with difficult situations as and when they arise. Bourdieu (1999), for example, refers to 'non-violent communication' depending upon 'active and methodical listening' (pp 608-9). I was most able to meet this ideal of ethical social research when I felt

relaxed and comfortable myself. In general, this occurred more in later interviews as I became accustomed to the process. However, most of the interviews raised very difficult emotions for me. Given the dominance of rational masculinist discourse within university systems, researchers may be left on their own to deal with the emotions of research. Colleagues who may well be sympathetic and supportive are likely to be overworked in their efforts to survive in a highly competitive and increasingly market-driven environment. Finally, researchers may accept a privatised view of emotions and feel ashamed to admit feelings of shame, fear and anxiety. For research to be 'ethical', these emotional and organisational issues must be addressed. As Buddhist theorist and teacher Thich Nhat Hanh argued 'the practice of the healer, therapist, teacher or any helping professional should be directed towards his or herself first, because if the helper is unhappy, he or she cannot help many people' (cited in hooks, 1994: 15). Unfortunately, academic positions, whether teaching or research, are rarely considered to be healing or helping professions.

Another ethical concern in such research is the hierarchical relationship between the researcher and the researched. 'It is the investigator who starts the game and sets up its rules, and is usually the one who, unilaterally and without any preliminary negotiations, assigns the interview its objectives and uses' (Bourdieu, 1999: 609). This in and of itself is not necessarily problematic if all participants are happy to enter into a temporary hierarchical relationship (see my earlier discussion on sadomasochism). Nor, I suggest, is the problem that the researcher is the one who produces the final analysis of the stories developed through the interview process. Indeed, this is inevitable. Rather, I follow David Silverman's (1985) ideal of non-authoritarian production of knowledge. Research is authoritarian when the researcher falls into the role of scholar, State counsellor or partisan. The scholar, in Silverman's terms, follows an elitist liberal politics that fails to recognise the production of knowledge as an act of power through a belief that knowledge is in itself neutral. The State counsellor, on the other hand, produces knowledge with the intention of providing knowledge for elites to make appropriate decisions for 'the masses'. Finally, the partisan utilities the research process as a way to justify their own political position, which depends upon 'the eminently elitist notion of false consciousness' (p 185) as the researcher already has 'the right answer'. For a non-authoritarian alternative, Silverman draws upon the autonomous (as opposed to statist) elements of Marx's writing, including his arguments that only the workers could 'describe with full knowledge the evils which they endure; only they and not providential saviours can energetically apply remedies to the social ills which they suffer' (Marx, quoted pp 194-195).

Silverman's arguing corresponds with David Graeber's (2004) vision of ethnography as

Something of a model, if a very rough, incipient model, of how non-vanguardist revolutionary intellectual practice might work. When one carries out an ethnography, one observes what people do, and then tries to tease out the hidden symbolic, moral, or pragmatic logics that underlie their actions; one tries to get at the way people's habits and actions make sense in ways that they are not themselves completely aware of. One obvious role for a radical intellectual is to do precisely that: to look at those recruiting viable alternatives, try to figure out what might be larger implications of what they are (already) doing, and then offer those ideas back, not as prescriptions, but as contributions, possibilities -- as gifts (pp 11-12).

Both Silverman's autonomous Marxism and Graeber's anarchism share the antirepresentationalist ethic that I have promoted in this research. The aim of this research has not been to demonstrate the truth of mixed relationships in Britain at the beginning of the millennium. Nor has it been to claim to understand, analyse, and represents the truth of individual experiences. Rather, the process has functioned on a gift economy, an anarchist economics of research if you will. I put out a request, asking people to share their stories with me. Of the offers I received, I was able to accept 16. These stories have then provided the basis for my own gifts. For theory to be a gift, it must be accessible, as bell hooks argues.

Within white supremacist capitalist patriarchy, we have already witnessed the commodification of feminist thinking (just as we experience the commodification of blackness) in ways that make it seem as though one can partake of the 'good' that these movements produced without any commitment to transformative politics and practice. In this capitalist culture, feminism and feminist theory are fast becoming a commodity that only the privileged can afford. This process of commodification is disrupted and subverted when as feminist activists we affirm our commitment to a politicised revolutionary feminist movement that has as its central agenda the transformation of society. From such a starting point, we automatically think of creating theory that speaks to the widest audience of people (1994: 71).

My gifts include contributions not only to sex education practice and radical activism (see below) as well as academia, but also to the participants themselves. After the thesis is finished I will produce an accessible summary to be shared with participants and other interested parties, as well as magazine articles, leaflets and workshops developing out of the PhD work.

For Deleuze and Guattari, philosophy should be 'utopian', 'so as to summon forth a new earth, a new people' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994:99). While this may sound very mystical, it is consistent with the arguments that subjectivity is produced through social practices. An earth upon which pathological shame was not ubiquitous, as I suggest it must be in hierarchical societies, would indeed be populated by a new people. Deleuze and Guattari emphasise that this new earth should be antiauthoritarian. 'In utopia (as in philosophy), there is always the risk of a restoration, and sometimes a proud affirmation, of transcendence, so that we need to distinguish between authoritarian utopias, or utopias of transcendence, and immanent, revolutionary, libertarian utopias' (1994:100). Though the summoning forth of a new earth is ambitious as a PhD project, I aim to make a modest contribution to that effort. In terms of new people, the interviews alone may have had some small effect.

Bourdieu (1999) once described the interview as a process of creating a transformative space, which changes both the interviewer and interviewee. I know that I have been transformed. While I have not asked all the participants for feedback on their experience, those with whom I have spoken have been very positive. After sending Erica a draft of her story (see Chapter Five), she wrote to me:

I got the draft in the post this morning. It's fine as it is, I'm actually really impressed and can't wait to read the whole thing! It's a powerful experience reading my own words in print, not just in a do-I-really-talk-like-that kind of way, but also being confronted with what I said, and finding that it's, well, true, I really did mean it, I still mean it and live it and intend to carry on. Because if that is me, then I am someone. It strongly counteracts that vague sense of unreality I've had all my life. So strongly in fact, that I don't think I could have handled it a few years ago! I'm glad I met you, and that you asked me to take part in this project, and that I said yes. I'm glad my interview helped. I'm glad you're writing this thing.

This ideal of the transformative space constitutes another element of the gift economy. If, as I argue later in this thesis, having the opportunity to speak openly about issues of concern is an important part of empowering resistance, then the interview itself is potentially a gift to the interviewee as well as to the interviewer. For this to be the case, the interviewee must have the opportunity to speak about what is important to them as well as what is important to the interviewer. During interviews, I encouraged participants to carry on talking about issues that seemed particularly important to them, using open ended questions and encouraging

expressions. I also listened to stories, even when I was not sure whether or not they related to my own research aims. At times, this seemed like a bit of a weakness. I thought I should have a better idea of what I was researching and what I wanted to know. However, not only did this more open approach offer greater opportunity to participants, it also provided me with material that may not have emerged had the interviews been more structured.

Rather, I have crafted from their stories new stories as gifts. I do not claim the authority to tell the truths of the lives of these individuals. Rather than representing lives, I am re-presenting stories that have been presented to me. In this sense, I identify my role in the research process as more of a story gatherer and storyteller than a 'social scientist'.

For literature, in contrast to science, thought is inseparable from language; 'writing' is aware of itself as language. Certainly what Barthes says about science rings true for much sociological writing which regards itself as a scientific representation of reality, and hence not writing (*that* is for fiction). Notions of truth in sociology are connected with the idea of a reality that is a presence, there to be represented: sociological text is a transparent bearer of the truth of the world. [...] Writing disturbs 'reality', and any truth grounded in reality; it also disturbs the notion on objective observer, outside social relations. The only reality we can discuss is culturally produced. And the scholar -- one who uses language -- is *in* language, the sociality of language; the scholar is culturally produced (Game and Metcalfe, 1996: 90).

It would be no gift to claim to tell the truth of people's lives for them -- they can speak for themselves. Arguably this is no different from any sociological research which can only ever be 'an account of accounts'.

### Sex Education

In response to Edinburgh becoming labelled 'AIDS Capital of Europe' in the late 1980s, Edinburgh Council started an HIV and AIDS education programme that has evolved over the years into a broader sexual health education project. Since the autumn of 1999, I have been a part of the team doing this work. In three hour sessions with small groups of S5 (15 to 16-year-olds) students, we facilitate open discussion of topics including: sexually transmitted infections and HIV, condom use<sup>7</sup>, sexual identity and stigma, peer pressure,

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<sup>7</sup> In Catholic schools we are not allowed to show students condoms, but only to discuss them.

sexual-relational skills and questioning definitions of sex (i.e., moving beyond the focus on penetration as definitive of 'sex').

Bagnall and Lockerbie (1996) performed a quantitative evaluation of this project. Their findings suggest that work done by the council's sexual health team were received much more positively by students than schools' previous efforts. Particular advantages of the team included sessional workers' 'anonymity' and 'specialist expertise', enhancing students' perceptions of effectiveness of the small group discussions. The authors conclude by acknowledging the value of this form of educational work. Watson and Robertson (1996) utilised qualitative methodology to evaluate the programme. Their research found an 'increase in the pupils' confidence in talking about sexual issues' (p295). Concurrent with the quantitative study, they also found a great benefit in bringing in outside facilitators who 'were not viewed as people in authority or as part of the school establishment' (p295). Furthermore, the interactive nature of the programme allows for experiential learning that enables social and behavioural skills development. Overall, the authors argue that this programme 'is a good model of practice' (p291).

As well as being valuable for the students, this work has had a massive impact on my life in general, and on my research work in particular. Working mostly with young men, I have developed a much greater understanding of the pressures of heterosexual masculinity. In one session I will never forget, I participated in a half-hour long discussion driven by a group of young men who had a great desire to talk about homophobia. The young men felt strong peer pressure to be homophobic or else be labeled gay. Although they did not want to support homophobia, this was a lesser evil than being called gay themselves. Furthermore, they recognised, with some prompting, that homophobia was also damaging to them, because their need to avoid being labeled gay constrained their behaviour. Although they were obviously desperate to talk about these things, when asked they said it was impossible to talk about (outside of this exceptional situation). Indeed, two of the students were obviously uncomfortable and kept trying to change the topic. If we understand oppression to be systematic mistreatment (New, 2001), then these young men, regardless of their sexual orientation identities, are oppressed (see Phoenix et al, 2003) and silenced by themselves and each other. However, these young men would rarely be recognised as oppressed; they were upper-middle to upper class, the majority were 'white', and, I presumed, would largely identify themselves as heterosexual. Within the social divisions of gender, class, ethnicity and sexual



orientation, these people generally come out on top. This experience supported my belief that it was important to recognise the notion of sexual orientation as oppressive in general, not just for 'sexual minorities'.

At the same time, as my theoretical work developed I began to apply it to my sexual health education practice. I have developed effective ways of encouraging young men to consider the ways in which they are damaged by rigid notions of heterosexual masculinity. The feedback forms from one session emphasised the value of this discussion for a group of young men. In response to question on the form, 'Which part did you find most interesting?' two young men said it was gender stereotypes of masculinity and how they were expected to fulfil them. In another session the young men were very quick to grasp the ways in which labelling others 'slag' or 'poof' simultaneously resulted in constraining themselves to avoid being like those Others. I had also developed techniques to encourage them to consider how divisions of masculinity and femininity, central to the ongoing construction of 'sexual orientation', impair sexual-relational skills (active consent, respect, communication, etc.)

### Activism & Identity

Although all elements of the rhizome are entirely interdependent, I find it nearly impossible to separate the developments of my identity and activism over the past decade or so. At the tender age of 18, I escaped the very heterosexual village of Laurens, Iowa<sup>8</sup>. I was off to the very liberal (and very visibly queer) Grinnell College. I looked forward to the great gay community I had read about in glossy corporate magazines. I immediately threw myself into LGBT activism, eventually becoming one of the student coordinators of the Stonewall Resource Centre. Gay was good and I was determined to be a good gay boy. The problem was, I was not very good at being gay. I did not fit in with the 'gay community' and I occasionally fancied women. I tried bi next, but I wasn't very good at that, either, apparently, because I did not fancy enough women. After that, I was queer, which seemed very exciting for a while.

Around this time, I moved to Scotland and became active as a Pride organiser. Just

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8 Strangely, the claim to fame of this village is a film entitled *The Straight Story*, the story of Alvin Straight who rode his lawn mower (he had no driving license) across the midwest to visit his brother in hospital.

before this event, I came across *Read My Lips* (Wilchins, 1997) a radical transgender-feminist critique of identity politics. I then saw performance artist The Divine David proclaim that he couldn't afford to be gay. My background in feminist theory and my increasing involvement with anarchist politics encouraged me to recognise the intersection of oppressions, particularly class. I saw the first Pride events I had helped organise with new eyes, and frankly I was disturbed by LGBT policing and consumption. Although my immediate response was to resign, my partner encouraged me to stay on and organise the Diversity Area for the next year. Amnesty International served tea and coffee, various political groups offered information outside (in the rain), and the stage was a unusual collaboration of not-your-usual-gay performances. I had the gratification of hearing a report of an attendee who was happy there was a place on the site that 'wasn't so fucking gay'. During this time I decided to give up on sexual orientation identity, and became, rather embarrassingly, dogmatically anti-identity.

The next incarnation of my activist life was the founding of the Sexual Freedom Society, which later became Intercourse: talking sex. The aim of this network continues to be supporting an encouraging people to talk openly about sex, sexuality and relationships. We have produced two popular leaflets: *Give Yourself a Hand: An Introductory Guide to Masturbation* and *Are You Normal? (sexually speaking)*. The first seemed like a very good cross-identity topic. The second takes apart the idea of normal, including a section specifically focusing on 'sexual disorientation':

Supposedly people can be put into three boxes, depending on whether they fancy women, men or both. While this is a popular idea, it seems to cause an awful lot of suffering. People worry a lot about their image, trying very hard to make sure that others realise 'what' they are. At the same time, we worry about 'what' other people are -- are they like me or are they different? (Aren't we all different?) Even worse, some people are so unhappy and anxious about these 'differences' that they attack others, either physically or verbally. Even people who call themselves 'straight' get attacked. Finally, people suffer when they desire others of the 'wrong' sex, or if they are worried that others think they do. This idea of 'sexual orientation' leads to so much suffering over something that really should be very nice. Maybe we should get rid of it and just **enjoy ourselves** . . . (Intercourse, 2003)

In many ways, my sex education work and this research project are both compatible with the aims of Intercourse. Rather than advocating any identity (or non-identity) position, they both encourage thinking, talking and (ultimately) changing practices.

Finally, if I had not become involved in antiauthoritarian politics, this research project would have been very different. Anarchist theory is only just becoming increasingly visible in studies of alternative globalisation movement, but certainly not in the areas of gender and sexuality studies. I would not have sought out anarchist theory, if not for the inspiration of my activist experience. More importantly, the motivation for continuing the project stems from the value it has had, and I expect will continue to have, for my own life and for the lives of others. This thesis should not be understood so much as work of an individual 'intellectual' or 'activist', but as an effect of political mobilisation of which 'I' am only a small part.

For me 'intellectual' is an old concept -- intellectuals who are separate from the movement. For me, there isn't a division between the intellectual and the movement. For me the movement of movements are a collective intellectual. [...] And for me there isn't a separation with the people that study and the people who practice. The practice needs study and the study needs practice. And this idea in the movement of movements makes a collective intellectual -- the rule of vanguardism is finished. Separated theoretical work is the first step in vanguardism. This work is abstraction; the practice of the movement is an abstraction for the work of the separated intellectual. This is important for me. We make a new conscience -- we are all intellectual, we are all activists. (Luca Casarini in Shukaitis, 2003:89).

## Emotion

This research project is the product of a passionate sociology (Game and Metcalfe, 1996). I have never been, nor do I ever intend to be, a dispassionate, rational and distant commentator on social life. From the beginning, my intentions have been not only to develop political ideas to enable resistance to sexual orientation and help others, but also to understand my own experiences. I feel as I have had some success on this front, though not without difficulties.

My emotional responses to the experience of interviewing people about their sexual identities, desires and practices are important for understanding the research process. Thomas

Scheff's (1990) concept of pathological shame has been useful, not only in theorising participants' experiences of sexual orientation, but also for thinking about my own experience of researching this area. The identity of a rational 'sex researcher' or 'social scientist' was once an appealing fiction, though maintaining it depended on failing to acknowledge the extent to which I was ashamed of asking people intimate questions. Their stories often resonated deeply with my own past and present experiences of sexuality and relationships, forcing me to address feelings that I had long felt more comfortable avoiding.

This, of course, affected the interview process. In my efforts to demonstrate my identification with a given participant, I sometimes assumed that we shared a common understanding rather than encouraging them to elaborate their own analysis. For example, my interview with Sandra was one of the earliest, and for that reason one of the most stressful for me. The approach I took in questioning was not always open-ended and encouraging, but often offering my own analysis of what she had said, both to demonstrate that I understood and to check to see if I had. Sandra challenged me on this by pointing out my assumptions. Here, we were discussing her problems with 'dykelings' (young lesbian and bisexual women). At the end, she compares my assumptions here with my frequent namedropping of Holly Near to demonstrate that I knew about women's music because I could name a singer.

Sandra: I'm not saying that I want them to suffer but sometimes I want them to realise.

Jamie: You want them to look at the bigger picture of the injustices that have happened to people.

Sandra: Yeah.

Jamie: That kind of ...

Sandra: Well, that's only ... *that's touching on a kind of an edge of it.*

Jamie: Recognising where they fall within that as well or have a sense of history.

Sandra: Have a sense of history, I suppose, is the closest but ... yeah. I want them to have a sense of how lucky they are to be where they are and to be able to be who they are and ... I don't know. I don't really know where I'm going with this but there's something in there that is ...

Jamie: So is it that you feel like they focus so much on the injustices which they perceive themselves to be victims while not also recognising they have

a lot of privileges relative to a lot of other people especially people that have been around longer?

Sandra: That's probably part of it. That's probably just part of it. I mean another part if like culture. It's like ... *you've brought up Holly a couple of times*. She's not, for me, the ... but I know what you mean. But sort of like that. It's like ... there's a lot of things jumbled in that I have yet to make concrete but those things are touching on bits of it, I think. (My emphases)

In the end, she became self-conscious about trying to explain how she felt and stopped trying. If I had had a more relaxed style, if I had not been in the rigid grip of pathological shame, then this portion of the interview may have elicited rich data. Indeed, feeling comfortable in the interview situation and after would have made for a more enjoyable and the research experience.

If I were to imagine beginning this research project again, my own emotional experience would be the issue I would think about most carefully. The emotional impact of participants' narratives of shame and violence in the policing of sexual orientation was very intense. I did not know how to talk to friends or colleagues about my experiences in research, as this would have challenged my fiction of expertise. Whether understood as pathological shame (Scheff, 1990), an emotional effect of the rigid hierarchies of universities (Game and Metcalfe, 1996) or anxieties resulting from discussing difficult topics, the work was emotionally challenging to point where I needed to seek counselling for my well-being. I tended to see this more as a personal weakness than as an inevitable effect of the research process. If I were to begin again, I would hopefully that are capable of finding consistent sources of emotional support, professional or otherwise, throughout the process. I would also aim to document more carefully the research process, something I felt too ashamed or anxious to do with this project. I entered each interview afraid and left too drained to take notes. Even at the end, writing this chapter on methodology has been one of the hardest as it has at times felt like a confession of my limitations as a researcher. Perhaps, then, this process will encourage a sense of modesty in future research on sensitive topics.

## Relationships

Over the years, most, if not all, of my sexual and/or romantic relationships have been 'mixed'. At times, this has been deeply troubling. In one relationship, a partner refused to label

himself, which made me anxious. In the same year, a relationship with a woman had me anxious over a my inability to labelling myself -- was I *really* bisexual or queer? Or was I *really* gay? Other relationships have been both 'mixed' and difficult to define (is this friendship, romantic love and/or sexual desire?), have also made me very anxious. In hindsight, all these anxieties have stemmed from my desire to be able to situate myself clearly in relation to these significant others. Who was I? Who were they? What was our relationship? I had been led to believe that these questions should not be difficult. When it turned out that they often are, I was unprepared.

My own capacity to live with the ambiguities of relationships and desires, that is to resist orientation, is interwoven with living through those relationships and desires. In addition to my 'personal' relationships, those I have developed with students and co-workers in sexual health have been invaluable to the sense of empowerment I have needed, and continue to need, to overcome policing. Last but not least, my sense of empowerment has been supported by having the privilege of asking 16 people about the complexity of their own desires and relationships. These brief, but intimate, relationships with strangers have had a powerful effect on my life. For these reasons, as well as the contents of my participants' stories, I have placed relationships at the centre of my analysis. Of course, as all of social life is a decentralised network of relationships, this centre is no centre at all.

Indeed, my capacity to resist orientation through this project of postgraduate study on sexuality and anarchism, piling stigma upon stigma, taboo upon taboo, has depended not only upon particular individual relationships, but also upon awareness of and participation in networks. I very much doubt that I would have had the bravery to even consider an anarchist approach to this research if it were not for various anarchist networks, academic and activist. Furthermore, if previous activist experience had not empowered me to initiate the development of a local anarchist studies group, completing an antiauthoritarian PhD would have been much more difficult.

## Conclusion: Rhizomic justifications

The idea that philosophy creates concepts that are inseparable from a form of life and mode of activity points to a constant dimension of Deleuze's conception of thought and philosophy. It implies that the test of these concepts is ultimately pragmatic: in the end, their value is determined by

the uses to which they can be put, outside as well as within philosophy (Patton, 2000:6).

In conclusion, arboreal research is justified through reference to scientific narratives of truth. Rhizomic research, on the other hand, can be justified by how well it works. Does it help us understand reality differently, opening up possibilities for change? Is it plausible in terms of other stories ('empirical' and 'theoretical')? The answer to both of these questions seems to me clearly affirmative. 'Personally', this research project has helped me to understand my experiences of 'sexual orientation' and provided me for ideas of 'good practice' within relationships. Likewise, Erica's response to reading her story from Chapter Five offers further justification for this research project as a valuable one. Furthermore, my own use of the research for improving my sexual health education practice clearly demonstrate its value for social change. Over the years of this project, I have also facilitated workshops with fellow activists, addressing the issues analysed in the research. Not only has attendance often been very high, indicating the necessity of more discussions around sexuality and relationships and activist circles, but the feedback I have received from these discussions has been invariably positive, including constructive criticism.

Finally, although I have been critical of a wide variety of analytic perspectives, the narrative produced through this research process are in many ways compatible with the history of debate within sexual politics described in Chapter Two, and the theoretical perspectives explored in Chapter Three. Rather than offering any claims of absolute validity and truth, this work is a gift of fiction that coexists within the network of fictions that produce our understandings of reality. It is a contribution to ongoing discussions of what sexual orientation is, how people experience it, and what can be done to address the brutality and suffering it entails.





## Chapter Five

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### Two Tales of Resistance

*The whole history of progress of human liberty shows that all concessions yet made to her august claims have been born of earnest struggle. If there is no struggle there is no progress.*

*Those who profess to favor freedom, and yet deprecate agitation, are men who want crops without plowing up the ground, they want rain without thunder and lightning, they want the ocean without the awful roar of its many waters.*

*This struggle may be a moral one; or it may be a physical one; or it may be both moral and physical; but it must be a struggle. Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will.*

*Find out just what any people will quietly submit to and you have found the exact measure of injustice and wrong which will be imposed upon them, and these will continue till they are resisted.*

-- Frederick Douglass

*The goal of terrorists, whether of the freelance or the state variety, is to fill all our mental and emotional space with fear, rage, powerlessness, and despair, to cut us off from the sources of life and hope. Violence and fear can make us shut down to things and beings that we love. When we do, we wither and die. When we consciously open ourselves to the beauty of the world, when we choose to love another tenuous and fragile being, we commit an act of liberation as courageous and radical as any foray into the tear gas.*

-- Starhawk, *Webs of Power: notes from the global uprising*

In this chapter, I focus on the analyses of two narratives for a number of reasons. First, this offers an opportunity for methodological diversity. The complexity of each story risks being lost in an overview analysis of similarities and differences. This form of analysis is valuable and provides the basis for the following three chapters. Each story is unique and I could not bring myself to cut up each and every one. Furthermore, I have benefited from exploring these particular interviews as whole narratives in contrast to the more traditional method of across-narrative qualitative data analysis. Second, these two stories are exemplary in their ability to demonstrate the processes of policing, resistance and empowerment. Which brings me to the third reason I have introduced this chapter: it provides the reader insight into the methodological process through which I came to understand sexual orientation in these terms.

Mark was the first participant I interviewed after developing an interview schedule more carefully focused on issues of sexual identity, desire and relationships (see Appendix III). I was anxious about asking participants such intimate questions. Fortunately, Mark and I seemed to develop a rapport very quickly, and the interview was very comfortable. In addition to changing the focus to more explicitly sexual aspects of life, this interview marked another significant change. Reading the transcript, I first began to consider the idea that an anarchist analysis might be appropriate for this project.

Mark, born on the continent, has lived much of his life in the UK. He now lives in an urban area. He identifies as white, male and middle-class. He currently has no sexual orientation identity. I chose to explore Mark's story because it provides an excellent example of sexual nomadism. Over the course of his life, Mark has had a complex and changing relationship with 'sexual orientation'. Mark's story may seem extremely different from many people's experiences. He has suffered from multiple sources of stigma as well as having a somewhat unusual sexual history. Focusing heavily on difference might discourage us from recognising how his experiences illuminates the processes of policing, resistance and empowerment that produce 'sexual orientation'.

## **Mark's Story**

Mark actively resisted sexual state-forms: he rejected sexual orientation categories, had multiple romantic relationships, and challenged conventions of masculine sexuality.

## Resisting Orientation

I asked Mark, 'Do you think of yourself as having a sexual orientation?' He replied, 'Orientation? No. I consider myself to be a sexual being.' 'And has this changed?' I asked. 'I've thought about and worked on it for some 3 years. [...] I've believed it for a year and a half. I live it. I've been living it for the last year and a half but that ties in with lots and lots of other things that have been in the way, I think.' When I asked him what this meant, being a sexual being, he replied, 'that doesn't mean I'm attracted to everybody. It's not about tits or cocks. It's about the person.' This period of living without sexual orientation is one of two times which Mark cites as examples where he felt especially comfortable or happy about his sexuality. 'Most definitely this year has been very, very comfortable and a very nice place to be.'

Mark characterised his sexual nomadism as a political choice as well as a reality of his personal experience.

Mark: Because I believe that ... there are things that need to be challenged. [...] I think [...] sexuality is something that can be challenged on an almost daily basis especially in the work I do and I think that people do need to be challenged on their sexuality and that kind of ties in with my HIV status. It comes up time and time and time again. 'How did you catch the virus?' 'Are you gay?' What's that got to do with it? So yes, I chose the challenge, very much so. But I'm not ... it's not a fashion statement. I'm not out there trying to invent a 4th box or something.

Jamie: Is it entirely political? [...] The way you describe it, it was quite political.

Mark: No, it's not entirely political because I don't fit into one of those categories. I'm not straight. I'm not gay and I don't like 'bisexual'. [...] I just believe that people are sexual creatures and if we're going to have a box for bisexuals, then we also need a box for vegetables and we also need a box for animals and we also need a box ... we can go on and go on and go on creating boxes. I'm not going to sit in a box.

Mark's rejection of sexual orientation identity did not go unchallenged. While others attempted to put Mark into boxes, he refused to allow his sexuality to be overcoded.

I socialise on the gay scene constantly. [...] I had a very good friend who used to walk into every gay bar in [the city] with me and say 'this is mine and HE'S STRAIGHT, BY THE WAY.' And I got so pissed off with that,

that I said to him one day, 'look, I'm not straight. I'm not gay. I'm not bisexual. I'm Mark and if I'm happy to live with that then you've got to accept it'. And my friends have. I mean there are people that ... because of the [voluntary sector health] work I do, it kind of puts you in [...] a position of power where people snipe at you and they like to throw labels at me but I just refuse to take them up. So I think it kind of leaves them feeling frustrated. That's what labels are about, I think, aren't they? About other people being able to put you in a box and then ... I don't know, deal with you or not deal with you, as they feel fit. And my experience has been that if you refuse to be pushed into one of their boxes, they're kind of (SHRUGGING). I don't know a word ... it leaves them slightly powerless and confused.

As I argued in Chapter Three, power is not an object that some people hold over others, but a relationship which is enacted, like a claim of authority. Mark had learned to resist those claims of authority. In doing so, he recognised his own ability to take away their sense of power over him.

Mark's expenses of representation on the gay scene had a gendered dynamic.

Women on the gay scene think it's very cool, yes. So many gay men refuse to believe it and I do ... this is my assumption but I do really ... I even read it. There was a piece in [a gay] magazine a couple of months ago about gay guys fantasising about straight guys and I think the finishing line was 'and don't forget, once you've had them, they're no longer straight'. And it was just like 'well, what a load of bollocks.' Just because you've slept with someone that calls himself straight, doesn't mean he's gay because you slept with him. It's strange. The gay community just seem to be the most ... they love labels, more, I think, than the straight community. To use a label obviously. [...] The gay men that I've spoken to, they're kind of "yeah, nudge, nudge, wink, wink. Actually you're one of us." But my reply is "actually, I'm not".'

At this point in the interview, Mark seemed anxious that perhaps I would be like those gay men. After he said 'actually, I'm not', he went on to say 'But I think that's for you to decipher. I'm just telling you what happened.'

In fact that happened a few times during the interview, with Mark saying things like, 'God am I ... maybe I'm just a closet gay or something.' and 'These questions are kind of making me feel that I'm actually a heterosexual but I'm not, or if I am, I'm not taking it on board. No, I'm not.' These comments indicated to me that while he had been very successful in

creating a nomadic space for himself, it was a difficult one to maintain. The force of sexual state-forms, produced through everyday policing, constantly threatened to recolonise Mark's identity.

These colonisation efforts meant that Mark sometimes felt driven into a defensive position. The first time I heard Mark refer to his sexual identity, before he volunteered to be interviewed, he said 'I'm not gay'. I asked him about this.

Well it's not really a question that comes up a lot except when I'm doing work for the HIV community and then sometimes it comes up because the majority of people that are involved there are still predominantly gay, I suppose. [...] [T]he majority of people assume I'm gay. I've heard it from gay men. I've heard it from straight men. I've heard it from women. I've heard it so many times that if I'd had a pound for every time I've heard it, I'd be rolling in it and we wouldn't be sat here. We'd be doing this over at the Hilton, over dinner. So that's probably where that was coming from. I can't remember how ... you had a question right at the beginning, how do you describe your sexuality and I can't remember. Sexual. That's how I describe it. That's how I'd describe myself. Yeah, if it came out as 'well, I'm not gay' then it probably came out because I was assuming that people were assuming that ... what a way to go, eh? ... that I was gay. It's just ... I've had so many situations happen around planning stuff for HIV and AIDS where it's 'OK, well us gay guys together, we'll ...' and I'm like 'whoa, I'm not gay'. And then ... I can't remember. I'm guessing and that's probably why I said I'm not gay. I'm not straight and I'm not bisexual. I'm me. Sexual.

### Resisting Compulsory Monogamy

The second nomadic aspect of Mark's sexual experience is his polyamoury (i.e., having multiple simultaneous romantic-sexual relationships). Throughout the interview, Mark referred equally to the importance of both his male partner and his more recent relationship with a girlfriend. The significance of these relationships to Mark's sexual nomadism is an almost taken for granted truth throughout his story: that he loves Steven and Sarah very much. The importance of his relationships become clearer as the narrative continues.

## Resisting 'Sex'

Mark had had a long relationship with Steven that had become increasingly intimate over the years, including the development of a sexual relationship. Mark had also come to develop a nomadic concept of sex. Dominant understandings of sex often revolve around a phallogentric and linear process that begins with a man's erection and ends with his orgasm. While this definition is constantly contested and sometimes cannot even be applied to some sexual encounters (e.g. non-genitally oriented sadomasochism or sex between/among women), it holds considerable weight in many contexts and may be difficult to resist. Mark's relationship with Steven did not conform to this definition.

we had sex. And ... yeah, we had sex but what did that mean to me? It didn't really work on the level of erections. Well, it did for him. The first time it didn't for me. I don't even think I achieved an erection, let alone come but sex isn't about that for me. Sex is a lot more. It's about also just being able to cuddle and feeling just being very comfortable with someone and so on that level it worked very much and we went on and, I don't know, for the last maybe 2 years ... he knows that I love him. I do love him dearly and he's told me recently that he loves me and we sleep together occasionally and I can probably count on one hand the amount of times that I've climaxed with him but, as I say, that's not what it's about, for me. I've heard lots of women say that and I never believed them. 'It doesn't matter. I don't need ... as long as you're happy.' I used to think 'yeah, bollocks!' But, no, I believe it because I've experienced it. For me it's OK.

There had also been times with Steven where the experience had been orgasmic for Mark.

OK, well, would you rather I talked about like a full-on, red-hot sexual encounter with him, one of the few that there have been? I mean when it's been like that, well, we're normally quite drunk and on Ecstasy or something so all my inhibitions, I think, are out of the way and I can blame it on that maybe the next day so maybe that makes me feel better. Oh, it's been excellent then and there was one time when we both came together and that was spot on. That was just brilliant but that's not usually the case. Usually ... I kind of feel that although I described him earlier as 'the female' male, I kind of take on that female role whereby as long as he's orgasmed, it's OK and I'm just happy to curl up next to him and stroke his hair while he falls asleep or whatever.

Mark very openly defined sex as not centred on orgasm. 'It's all about loving and cuddling and touching and feeling nice and warm and safe. That's what sex is, for me anyway.' At the same

time, he seemed to want to be able to enjoy orgasms with Steven more frequently. I asked him about his talk of needing to lower inhibitions.

Mark: Yeah, that's a question that I don't know the answer to. Maybe, maybe not. I don't know. I'm telling ... because that's been the experience so far, I'm slightly concerned that that might be the reason that I have to be out of my head on something but I hope it's not. I hope it just hasn't occurred because it hasn't occurred. In fact, I'm lying because the time we came together, we were both completely sober. Well we were both hungover but we both ... no, we both knew very much what we were doing so, no, that was good. So it has happened. Sorry.

Jamie: But it just doesn't happen very often.

Mark: No. That's the only time I can think of.

Jamie: Mostly it's him getting off and you getting a cuddle. That makes it sound bad.

Mark: Yeah, that makes it sound like a trade-off because I don't have a problem with him getting off because it's not him getting off. I'm getting him off and that's kind of nice too. Does that make sense?

Mark's nomadism does not exist without boundaries. This is no criticism; constructing a 'sexuality without boundaries' (whatever that may be) as a new standard would be as authoritarian as compulsory heterosexuality or lesbian purity. The forms Mark's resistance had taken are less important, in this regard, than demonstrating his capacity for resistance and trying to understand what has empowered him to express it. Mark's resistance to sexual policing is even more remarkable given Mark's background of sexual abuse and exploitation.

### History of abuse

Mark: Where to start. OK, from a very early age, at school in [UK City], I was aware, for some reason, that older men were attracted to me and I used to have horrible situations whereby I'd be scared to get off the bus at [my stop ...] and I'd, for example, get off at [another one] and walk another way home [...] because there were certain people that would know what time I was coming home and would wait for me and follow me home. Or even worse, would be there in the morning and follow me to school.

Jamie: How old were you?

Mark: 13, 14, 15. I was also abused at an early age, sexually abused, at

the age of 12 and that kind of ties in with this ... I don't know, that's probably why I was scared of these people and didn't really know where to go with that information.

Then, at the age of 16, he attended a homoerotic play, which he had worked on as part of his college course.

during the first half somebody started to fondle me and I got excited [...] it was all very mixed up [...] like my father was in the military and my grandfathers were in the military and my grandfathers' grandfathers were in the military. You know 'men are men'. I didn't enjoy the abuse although, again, there was some sort of sexual excitement [...] so it was all very mixed and confusing [...] I was confused about them touching me, about the fact that I got erect and was excited or ... yeah, that's the word, 'excited'. At the time, I didn't want to be excited but that's what it was, I suppose. Yeah, that wasn't right at the time, I suppose. But God, there was so much confusing around that, that I wouldn't really know what to say.

Feminist research on sexual violence (e.g., Kelly, 1987; Kelly and Radford, 1996; McLeod and Sherwin, 2000) demonstrates the ways in which such relationships have the effect of representing the non-consenting person as an object, limiting their autonomy. Through these frightening and confusing experiences, Mark's identity was policed. Likewise, the less extreme but related forms of sexual violence embodied in his family's militaristic ideals of heterosexual masculinity led Mark to find the experience at the theatre even more difficult to cope with. Mark's story indicated that the possibility of consensual sexual activity with another man might have been exciting, though at odds with his masculine identity. As is clearly illustrated here, the possibility of heterosexual identity depends upon the policing of gender. A further factor had the effect of constraining his autonomy and capacity to develop more effective ways to resist sexual harassment than changing his travel patterns. Mark was afraid and 'didn't know where to go'; he had no access to sources of support and advice.

Around the same time, Mark also had his first consensual sexual experience, which resulted in an unplanned pregnancy.

well, at the age of 16 I went out and lost my virginity to a girl and got her pregnant all in the same night and I happened to have friends, an older peer group that I hung around with and always had hung around with and they were very much into drugs and heroin was their drug of choice and I remember going and saying 'oh my God, my girlfriend's pregnant and I'm only 16 and she's 16 and I can't go home with this. This is the end of the



line and I don't know what to do', and somebody said 'here, have some of this' and I kind of had a hit and for 8 hours I didn't really care what was going on. And so I sort of quickly got into heroin in a big way.

Mark had extensive needs and capacity to fulfill them was limited. First, he was unable to effectively manage sexual risk. Second, he did not have the emotional capacity to deal with the consequences of this mismanagement and chose drug use as an alternative. This situation is hardly unique among young people in the UK. In fact, it can be recognised as interrelated with the hierarchical binary logic upon which sexual orientation depends, and which it supports (e.g., Sedgwick, 1990). Two key factors in unsafe sex among young people are rigid gender expectations and the construction of sex as natural in opposition to contraception as unnatural, which in turn depend on divisions of male/female, mind/body, rational/emotional and natural/unnatural (Holland, J., C. Ramazanoglu, et al. 1998; Luker, 1975). The policing that produces binary logic in this situation inhibited Mark from recognising, much less exploring, alternative possibilities. Third, Mark's comment that he couldn't go home suggests that it was a heavily policed environment, characterised by militaristic masculinity. Although harmful and unconstructive, heroin use and the oblivion it provided can be interpreted as an act of resistance, an effort to escape policing.

Mark described walking in the street after the birth of his daughter as the other of two key periods in his life where he felt most comfortable with his sexuality. 'Here I was, obviously a man because I've got a woman and a child.' He felt secure when he was able to demonstrate evidence of his heterosexuality and virility. The continuous production of normative and stigmatised possibilities for gendered and sexualised presentation of self necessarily resulted in insecurity: no position of privilege can ever be completely secure. Mark's ability to maintain a status of heterosexual masculinity must have felt particularly insecure due to his (nonconsensual) same-sex experiences. His public presentation of woman and child offered him a chance to bolster a 'normal' status.

Throughout the interview, Mark suggested that his drug addiction was intertwined with anxieties about sexuality. His use of heroin to help cope with an unwanted pregnancy was only the beginning. Early on, we had the following exchange:

Jamie: OK, so the time you decided to stop using was the same time where

you started thinking of yourself as not having a sexual orientation? So it was about 3 years ago?

Mark: They are related but the question as to whether or not I had a sexual orientation was around slightly longer than that and possibly was one of the reasons that I started to dabble again, which ended up with me becoming addicted again, just the confusion around whether or not I had a sexual identity or orientation, whether or not it was important and all the hang-ups and what have you that go along with being a poof or being straight or being whatever.

Jamie: So it was quite a difficult time and it drove you back to drugs?

Mark: It was confusing. I think when you're an addict, you're looking for the reason you're an addict and if you can find the reason you're an addict, well you can sort that reason out and you're no longer an addict and it's only when you begin to unravel your own persona and the things that make you tick, that you realise that there's not just one thing that goes into making you an addict. It's like a whole ... one of those knots of snakes or something. It's a very, very complicated thing. And sexuality, because of my past, played a very strong part in my being an addict.

His heroin habit, ironically funded through sex work, allowed him to avoid dealing with sexuality. 'My life was turned off. That's what heroin does for you. No emotional attachment. The physical, well, we could have gone 10 rounds in the ring or an hour in bed or whatever. It was meaningless.' Opiates also have the effect of inhibiting sexual desire. As he put it, 'I didn't have a sex life. [...] If we go round to the church and try and explain that to the people down there, they would probably have trouble understanding it but ...I think you understand where I'm coming from. I didn't have a sex life.'

Mark did not enjoy his career as a sex worker, but it served dual functions of funding his habit and taking revenge on men.

And so my addiction ... so because all this had gone on and I'd kind of felt used by ... I'm saying gay men now but then I would have said by 'queers' or 'faggots' or something very negative. I thought 'well, you've used me. I'm going to use you.' And I ended up as a rent boy, earning money to pay for my addiction. 'On the game' as they say. A title I find very funny because it's very, very far removed from any game that I enjoy but that's a phrase they use, 'on the game'. I was involved in prostitution.

Because Mark would not have chosen to be a sex worker if it were not for his dependence on

heroin, and because it was tied up with his childhood experiences of sexual violence, I see his sex work as a continuation of the sexual violence of his past. Mark's autonomy, and in particular his sexual autonomy, continued to be constrained during his employment as a sex worker.

Eventually, Mark went into rehabilitation and gave up sex work. There, he tested positive for HIV. Giving up heroin in rehab, Mark's sexual desires, which had been dulled by opiate use, returned. Mark became very heterosexually active and, at the same time, very homophobic.

Mark: I hated gay men for a very, very long time, even after I came out of rehab, I hated gay men. [...] I was a very, very angry heterosexual man. [...] In my [support] group there were two homosexual men who I fought with constantly, verbally and once physically. They were perceived as the enemy at that time.

Jamie: The enemy?

Mark: Well, yeah. There's a triangle that I can never remember and it's got the enabler, the victim and ... another side to it. I can never remember what the other side is but they were seen as the enabler and the enabler, as the name says, enabled me to use. [...] Well, the guy that I'd lived with had been a dealer so I kind of held him responsible for my sister's [drug-related] death and [...] he was the person who got rich by selling and making money from death and other homosexuals had been my means of getting money to indulge in this slow torturous putting to death of oneself, myself. So, yeah, I viewed them as the enemy.

He even went out queer-bashing on a number of occasions, but never actually found any victims, for which he was very thankful. Mark blamed gay men for his HIV status and drug addiction. Mark felt a strong need to express anger at the same time as differentiating himself from homosexuality. Emotions such as guilt, anger and hatred prevented Mark from seeing that gay identified men were not his opposite, not the enemy.

While in rehabilitation, he also regularly visited male public sex areas, so afraid that he carried a weapon.

[...] I suppose it was also wrapped up in my self-esteem. It was like when I was using, these people obviously liked me because they paid me to have

sex with me and so I suppose there was perhaps a big gap when I stopped using as to my self-worth [...] Maybe I was checking out if I was still desirable.'

Mark's was still deeply drawn to homosexuality. He said that it offered him both the excitement of risk and the validation of his attractiveness. His relationship with homosexuality was both intense and ambivalent. This relationship was not one that allowed him to consider that homosexuality might not be the opposite of heterosexuality.

Mark described one sexual experience from this period of his life:

Mark: I thought I was having sex with a woman and it was a boy. It didn't matter. I mean I had penetrative sex, which I was expecting to have anyway. It just so happened that it was anal as opposed to vaginal. [...] It wasn't a big deal.

Jamie: Were you surprised [...] that it was a turn-on?

Mark: No, because, [...] I'd masturbated, I suppose, over chicks with dicks in the past ...

Jamie: But that was also during your homophobic days, wasn't it?

Mark: They weren't men because they had tits. Work that one out. I don't know.

Mark was homophobic and insecure about his heterosexual identity, yet he was able to enjoy sex with a person whose morphology included aspects that are often considered definitive of male identity. The relative frequency of 'chicks with dicks' as objects of 'heterosexual' male fantasy in pornography and telephone sex lines indicates that gendered desire is not entirely binary. Despite this obvious contradiction, the illusion of binary sexual orientation was maintained for Mark as it is for many men.

I asked Mark how his attitudes about homosexuality had changed from intense homophobia to his lack of sexual orientation identity. He talked about significant relationships.

[When] I split up with [...] my soul mate, she was the one that said 'look, you need to look at your attitudes towards these people and that it

probably says more about you than me.' And because I wasn't prepared to listen to that, that's why we split up, I suppose.

But it made him think. After ending this relationship, Mark moved to another city where he became involved with HIV work and where he met many gay identified men. At the same time, he was exposed to discussions of the power of language, stigma and discrimination within HIV organisations. He cited these alternative discourses as an inspiration for his resistance to sexual orientation. When Mark moved to this new city he had no support network, and quickly became very close friends with a male couple who were supportive. He described the men's relationship in gendered terms, with a macho pool playing manly man and a camp, clothing conscious, long-haired womanly man. Initially, he felt much more comfortable in the company of the man he identified as straight-acting because he did not want to be associated with homosexuality. Then the couple split up and the 'macho one' moved away while the 'campy one' stayed. Mark's relationship with 'Steven' (the campy one) deepened, which Mark found confusing.

We became so close that I began to question what it was he wanted from me. I didn't have ... I didn't believe, because of my past, I didn't believe that people could like me for me, that ... there'd always been ... people had always wanted something from me and that was usually sex, especially men, and one night, out of I don't know ... we'd gone out and got drunk and out of the sort of wanting to show or demonstrate some sort of gratitude, I decided that I'd sleep with him, which was a complete disaster because I wasn't sleeping with him because I wanted to sleep him. I was sleeping with him to repay him for some debt that I thought that I had incurred. But fortunately, it was such a disaster that it was obvious that it was wrong, not only to me but to him and the next morning it was number one. He made breakfast and we needed to talk about this, what went on. And we were able to talk about it. It kind of blew me away. I was able to say just what I said to you there. 'The reason I slept with you last night or tried to sleep with you was because I thought that's what you wanted and that's why I owed you'. And he said 'no, that's completely ridiculous.'

### Empowerment and Ethical Relationships

And that's, I suppose, when I started to believe that people could like me for me and then I began to look at my sexuality as in, well, if I was prepared to do that maybe I could sleep with him as me.

I consider myself very fortunate that he was there and willing to ... I don't know, to lend himself to helping me discover what was going on inside my

head, I suppose. Very easy to say 'typical homosexual fantasy and he played his cards exactly right and got what he wanted' but no, that's not what he's about and that's not what he was about. He was honestly out to help me and he did.

Central to Mark's resistance to orientation were two significant (and ethical) relationships. He was only able to moved beyond an understanding of heterosexuality and homosexuality as opposites with Steven's care and support. Mark eventually begin a sexual relationship with Steven, which had lasted one and a half years at the time of the interview. In addition to his relationship with Steven, Mark had begun a new relationship with 'Sarah' three weeks prior to the interview<sup>9</sup>. He was unsure whether this new relationship would change his relationship with Steven.

I suggest that it is the anarchic characteristics of these relationships that enabled Mark to develop a sense of empowerment sufficient to resist orientation more effectively than he had previously. Mark talked about three aspects of relationships that he found desirable: mutual care, trust and openness. Mutual care is a core value of anarchist politics. Advocated by Kropotkin (1987 [1902]) as an alternative to the Hobbesian social Darwinism that has dominated discourses of human nature and biological and social evolution, mutual aid is presented as a significant force in human development as well as the ethical basis for anti-authoritarian forms of social organisation. Mutual aid has also been theorised through a gendered lens in feminist conceptions of an 'ethics of care' (Edwards and Mauthner, 2002) or even a 'love ethic' (hooks, 2000). By the same token, trust is necessary for nomadic relationships. Simultaneously, anarchist critiques of stable hierarchies as a form of interpersonal violence suggests that hierarchy inhibits capacity for trust: it is difficult to trust someone who claims authority over you or who is competing with you for authority. The ability to communicate openly, to accept each other's differences, and to resist pressure to maintain taboos concerning certain topics or practices are all supported by a rejection of hierarchy.

Mark described both of his romantic relationships as based in an ethic of mutual aid.

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9 Some might suggests that such a recent romantic development could only have little impact on Mark's sense of self and should not be called a 'relationship'. Similarly, many people argue that various examples of anarchist organisation (e.g. the Spanish Civil War, etc.) 'don't count' as evidence of the possibility of anarchism as (a) viable alternative(s) to governments and corporations because they didn't last 'long enough.' (See Bey, 1985 on the value of brief periods of anarchy.)

they both have this caring ... 'Sarah' fantasises [...] about caring for a man and [Steven...] is just a natural born carer. And I like being cared for. Now, don't get me wrong. There's payback for that. There's loads of payback for that. I don't lie in bed all day and have them do things for me. I like to do things for them too.

Mark emphasised the similarity of his two Steven and Sarah, rather than describing them as two types of relationships: heterosexual and homosexual. This was a marked contrast from his earlier experiences of 'sexual orientation' during a period of his life characterised by relationships of domination and exploitation. The emotional security provided by anarchistic relationships offered Mark a sense of stability that he had previously attempted to maintain through a macho heterosexual identity.

Given Mark's background of sexual abuse and exploitation, developing his capacity for trust in sexual relationships had not been easy. This applies particularly to men, though his relationship with Steven was exceptional.

Mark: Yeah. [...] I'm more often attracted to women. I could be attracted ... well if I am attracted to a man, then it would have to be ... I would have to feel that I held all the aces, if you like, before I would possibly take it any further.

Jamie: Why is that?

Mark: Why is that? That probably goes back to the abuse and being used and ... yeah, those issues, I think.

Jamie: Would you say you don't trust men?

Mark: Yeah. I am a man so I know what men are like. That's a terrible thing to say, isn't it? [...] And they've given me reason not to trust them so ... and I've also given people reasons not to trust me so, based on that, I'm generalising and, to be on the safe side, I'd just say that *men are men until they prove themselves differently*, as has [Steven]. (My emphasis)

Although the changes in Mark's life were dramatic, this example demonstrates that it is not a fairytale story of completely overcoming one's past. Like many people, Mark has had difficulty trusting men. The desire for dominance within so many constructions of masculinity is a crucial obstacle for efforts to abolish sexual orientation in particular and relationships of domination in general. In Mark's terms, Steven was no longer a man, because he had proved himself to be a caring being. Despite Mark's extraordinary experiences of masculine violence,

his anarchistic relationship with Steven had supported his resistance to sexual state-forms of sexual orientation, compulsory monogamy and masculine independence.

Mark also characterised his relationships with his Steven and Sarah as very open. They were the two people he mentioned being able to talk to about emotions around sexuality, including the abuse of experiences of his past. 'I do [talk about it with] two people. I do to the guy that we've been talking about and I do to my present girlfriend and although that's very, very new, we've talked intensely and long about it.' His relationship with Sarah offered further examples of the depth of trust and capacity to be very open about subjects and practices which are often constructed as taboo: sex between HIV- and HIV+ people, anal sex play (Morin, 1998), nonmonogamy and masturbation.

Like many positive people, Mark found it difficult to disclose his HIV status to prospective sexual partners. His disclosure to Sarah may have helped open up other taboo topics.

Three weeks into this relationship, [...] when we got back to her house, sex was imminent and I stopped and said 'look, we don't need this. I'm HIV Positive' and she said 'oh, don't be stupid. I know'. Oh God, that was just such a relief and from that moment on we've both been very, very ... no, we've both been very frank with each other and, without wishing to be disrespectful to my previous female partner, that wasn't ... it wasn't like that. So this ... Sarah is very, very comfortable to be with.

Anal sex play, along with self confidence, came up in discussions of what Mark found sexually attractive about Sarah.

Mark: What I find sexually attractive about her now? OK, she's not scared to be who she is. She's not scared not to shave under her arms. Not that I find that a turn-on, hairy armpits, but she has hairy armpits and she's not going to shave them because I might like clean-shaven armpits. She is comfortable in her own body and I find that sexually attractive. She's also quite happy to touch my arse and have her arse touched and things like that, which are things that are ... I don't know, new ... not new but I or my experience has taught me you kind of leave, for a while at least, until you get to know each other better. So we've kind of both kind of went in at the deep-end. I find all of that very exciting.

Jamie: And that's quite sexy?



Mark: Well, it's quite sexy, yeah, but that's not the bit that's sexy. The bit that's sexy for me is the openness, that there are no taboos or at least I haven't found any taboos yet.

Exploration was not limited to sexual practice, but extended to open communication about difficult topics including non-monogamy and masturbation.

Mark: Has it come up? Yeah. I mean she knows that I slept ... she knows that I've slept with Steven. [...]

Jamie: And did she know before that this was a possibility?

Mark: She knows that we love each other and that we've had sex and she knows that the sex doesn't work for me and so she obviously ... she doesn't feel threatened by it but that's ... I'm making an assumption here. I don't know. My feeling is that she doesn't feel threatened by it.

Jamie: Have you talked much about sexual identity and those kinds of things with her?

Mark: Yeah, I suppose we have. Yes, we have, yeah. She made love to a sweet potato recently and she ...

Jamie: [...] you trust each other enough to talk about sweet potatoes?

Mark: Yeah. I mean, masturbation, the biggest taboo, is it not? In this country? Big taboos, yeah.

Jamie: Yeah, especially for women.

Mark: Especially for women, yeah. Especially two sweet potatoes.

Jamie: Two at once.

Mark: Mmm. So ... God, that says that she's prepared to take risks for me and I can't not be happy with that.

Jamie: So she's talked to you of vegetables and you've talked to her about the other man? [...] And it's all still OK?

Mark: Yeah, very much so. I think that's strengthening it. We kind of started telling each other, very quickly, little things about the past and it was Sarah that said 'I'd rather hear it sooner than later' and that kind of fitted in nicely with how I felt. It was like 'OK, well, we've both got baggage. Let's get it out. Let's make this a safe place for both of us.'

The production of taboo is authoritarian because it involves producing unspeakable topics, which then must be policed. As I have earlier argued, authoritarianism depends upon the continuous production of rigid boundaries and binary logic. The taboos surrounding anal sex play, nonmonogamy and (creative, female) masturbation have mutually supportive relationships with hierarchies of reproductive over nonreproductive sex (Rubin, 1993), monogamy over nonmonogamy (Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1995), 'partnersex' over masturbation (Dodson, 1996), masculinity over femininity, and others. Openness rejects the authority that produces unspeakable topics and potentially disrupts the interrelated hierarchies; it also supported Mark's capacity to resist orientation.

### Sexual Anarchy

An anarchist reading has been consistent with the elements of Mark's story. He was greatly hurt by hierarchical sexual relationships of abuse and exploitation. Through the support of anarchistic relationships, characterised by mutual aid, trust and openness, Mark was able to overcome much of that harm. Not only that, he has been able to resist the authoritarianism of compulsory sexual orientation, compulsory monogamy and dominant conceptions of sex and relationships. This has involved massive changes in his emotions and his relationship with gender. Emotions such as guilt, fear, shame and hatred, which support conformity (Scheff, 1990) and, therefore, sexual state-forms, were tied up with Mark's (homophobic) heterosexual masculinity. Empathy, respect, trust and ultimately love offered Mark the opportunity to escape 'sexual orientation' by providing him with a sense of security that does not depend on his rejection of homosexuality and femininity. Finally, Mark experienced conditions that encouraged reflexivity, providing him space in which to reflect on the relationship between the personal and the political. Exploration of his self potential and relationships with others, facilitated by his partner and girlfriend, and his exposure to the alternative discourses of the voluntary sector, were crucial in Mark's nomadism.

My initial evaluation of Mark's story in terms of relationships of domination and anarchist resistance encouraged me to consider this as a basis of analysis for the thesis as a whole. But, I was still reluctant to commit myself to this controversial course. Various factors supported me in my decision to strike off nomadically creating this path, as I discussed in the previous chapter. Another interview, much later in the research process was valuable

encouragement for my own resistance to sticking to well worn academic paths. Highlighting the significance of this interview in the research process, and characterising the processes of policing, resistance and empowerment, here is Erica's story.

## Erica's Story

Erica was actively involved in anarchist politics and explicitly links this to her relationship with sexual orientation identity. Like Mark, Erica's early life was affected by relationships of domination. Also like Mark, she was able to overcome her history of abuse and develop comfortably nomadic relationships and desires. Again, in her nomadic life resisting borders, she was not without boundaries. She presented a high degree of awareness of what she needed to maintain a sense of safety in an insecure world.

### History of abuse

Jamie: Can you think of any examples where you felt embarrassed, guilty or ashamed about something to do with sex?

Erica: A lot of my life was like that really because I was molested when I was quite young and I think that [for much of my life, I thought of] sex and sexuality as being like a really big mess and being really not right and what was happening to me a lot of the time is that for many years my sex life was kind of a sort of stop and start kind of thing. I'd have either a bad experience or a sort of non-experience. You know when you have sex and sometimes think 'what was that about?' So there was a lot of that and periods of months when I wouldn't let anybody get anywhere near me or I was just really distressed or I couldn't handle having sex because I kept having flashbacks of abuse and things like that. So there was a lot of that and kind of ... not being very clear about consent and what it meant to have sex that I wanted with somebody that I wanted, [and ...] not knowing that very much and not really being there very much when it happened. So it was all that kind of mess that really goes with sexual abuse and that sort of thing. So a lot of the time, what would happen to me, especially when I was a teenager at school, was that, for some reason, other peers seemed to think that I was really sexually sussed and stuff and I was very aware that they thought that of me and I felt like a real fraud because actually I didn't think that I was. But at the same time I had quite a lot of sexual knowledge and kind of ... and I was quite articulate and I used to read more than they did and there were lots of different books at home that I could just pick up and read because there were lots of books in my home when I was growing up. So people kind of got this vibe from me that I was kind of sexually active and sexually sussed and whatever, and my only feeling was that

actually I wasn't and I didn't have a clue a lot of the time and I think I spent years feeling like a real fraud because of that. That was the main thing. I felt like I was ... So I felt like I was always hiding. Even when I was in a heterosexual community and nobody ever questioned my heterosexuality, even though it didn't really exist but I still felt like I was hiding. Yeah. Maybe that's why sexual orientation means fuck all to me because actually I know that you can still be in the closet even when sexual orientation is not even a question.

For Erica, overcoming the trauma of childhood sexual abuse was a long process. As with Mark, open communication and trusting relationships have been crucial to her recovery. Of particular significance was talking about sex.

Jamie: Do you talk with many other people about your emotions about your sexuality and how you feel about your sexuality and how you feel about ...?

Erica: I used to a lot more, I think, when I was in my twenties, early to mid-twenties, when I was in a real mess. I was really up to here in sexual abuse and so it was lots of me being distressed talking about my sexuality and feelings about sexuality, mostly with other people who were either just supportive people -- I went to sexual abuse support meetings once or twice so that sort of thing, or with other women -- very occasionally men but really mostly women who also survived abuse and we sort of shared an understanding on that. So a lot of my talking about sexuality would have happened in that time and most of it was negative. Occasionally it was just like 'oh, guess what?' That was fine. Guess what? That doesn't put me out anymore but that was quite rare. And then I suppose I kind of ... I probably still talk about it quite a lot but I feel like I don't because I used to talk about a hell of a lot and now I don't talk about it as much. So I feel like I talk about other things but mostly now I'm talking about sex and sexuality ... it's in a positive way and it's with mates. Yeah. And it's about how good it is.

Abuse went along with confusion around sexuality in general. Recovering from trauma was necessary for Erica to begin the process of understanding her relationship with sexual orientation.

Jamie: Do you think of yourself as having a sexual orientation?

Erica: I don't know. Not really, particularly. I think when I was trying to think of myself as having a sexual orientation, it was really messing my head up and then I was thinking 'oh, I must be really messed up' and then I realised when I dropped the sexual orientation dilemma, suddenly my head

wasn't messed up anymore. So it must have been that. I don't know.

Jamie: So what happened there?

Erica: I sort of grew up but also my sexual orientation identification is really bound up with lots of personal issues from my early life so I think I had all of that to sort out and then before I could feel confident enough to start questioning sexual identification taboos and boxes and things in society, I didn't have the confidence to do that because it was all such a disaster for me anyway, from a personal point of view. And once I kind of healed from a lot of trauma and sorted my head out, then I was able to look at stuff and think it's a load of rubbish. I don't have to conform to this. So I think it kind of happened that way round really and that happened during my mid to late-20's.

Jamie: So what boxes did you try to conform to?

Erica: Well I kind of tried to conform to a heterosexual box because that's pretty much what I thought I should do and then I sort of didn't try to conform to but considered a lesbian box and I thought it didn't really fit. I felt really uncomfortable with that and with all the connotations that I could see around that particular box and with the gay scene and I sort of considered bisexual box and that didn't feel particularly right either. It felt restrictive and it felt like ... the most difficult thing for me was that I felt that once I chose a particular thing to call myself, then I'd have to conform to that and I'd have to keep it up like a membership and I couldn't really handle doing that. So I kind of dropped, not intentionally, but I kind of dropped it all and then, at some stage, I realised that I didn't actually need any of that so I didn't pick it up again. It kind of happened like that.

Jamie: So what was restrictive about the bisexual box?

Erica: I was considering whether I could define myself as bisexual. I knew a few people who identified as bisexuals and they were wankers, just personal stuff. So I was just like 'no', housemates and other people that I met and I also knew a lot of people on the gay scene who spoke of bisexuals in very derogatory terms and always had a name for them behind their back or whatever and that was also really horrible. So because I was still shopping for identities, that didn't ... you know, that it wasn't a very good ad for it and also I really had this image, again, that I was getting from the outside, that being bisexual I'd have to have a male partner and a female partner all the time and that was kind of like ughh.

## Gay Police State

Sexual abuse was not Erica's experience only of (nonconsensual) sexual domination. She was subjected to pretty severe emotional violence on the gay scene where she would socialise with her (gay male) partner. She resisted having categorisation imposed upon her.

[P]eople on the gay scene saw me as a sort of closet girl who couldn't get her head sorted out and that would really make me mad. It was so patronising and I thought, actually if I stay on this scene and come out as anything to these people, they're going to question and I wasn't interested. And then I kind of moved away from the scene anyway and dealt with other shit and then moved to a different scene where actually it didn't matter at all. So then I was fine, but, yeah, it took a lot of shifting.

This example illustrates the problems of representation -- it is patronising to speak for other people. Furthermore, her spatial language of moving and shifting fits neatly with the Deleuzian concepts of state-forms and nomadism. This gay bar was a policed state. The policing of Erica's sexuality was not a singular act, but an ongoing process of trying to fit her into different boxes.

Jamie: Why do you think they thought you were a straight girl?

Erica: Because they did. I don't know why they thought that. I know they did think that because some people said that and some people told me about conversations that happened when I wasn't there and it was just the general attitude that I was picking up from them and I think when I was on the gay scene, it was when I first started seeing my lover who was on the gay scene. He was a gay man, and a lot of people couldn't quite work out what I was doing on the scene and they sort of ... some people were like really angry with me for being a het girl. They perceived me as a het girl because I had a male lover and I was a girl on the gay scene and I wasn't keeping up the pretence of being a fag hag so I wasn't supposed to be there. *I didn't match the criteria*. So then other people or sometimes the same people sort of tried to cope with that by sort of deciding that I must be a closet lesbian and [being] kind of really unhelpful, really patronising and quite aggressive sometimes verbally and generally quite weird with me. Women more so than the men. I think it was easier for men to get their head around me. Somehow they seemed more relaxed with me. Most of the women didn't, a lot of the women on the mainstream gay scene that I met did not like me at all. They were hostile to me, it was really awful. (My emphasis.)

The policing involved multiple forms of punishment for failing to fit into the accepted boxes.

That general hostility kind of thing and general kind of not talking to me, only talking to me about certain things rather than other things like going

off and having bits of their conversation by themselves, like never really treating me like I was in their lesbian club and ... the total opposite of solidarity in a sense and it was just like ... and it wasn't that hurtful because I wasn't close to any of these people but it was nasty. I didn't like it much really.

While Mark found that women on the gay scene were much more open to accepting his nomadism, Erica's experience was that (some) men were more accepting of her. If fear of the Other is indeed a recognition of the possibility of that otherness in oneself (e.g., Butler, 1993), then it might make sense that Erica's resistance would make women more anxious. She *could* be one of them, but she isn't. An alternative explanation might be that in an environment defined by same-sex desire, anyone who is ambiguous about their availability as either a same-sex partner or a member of the same identity might cause some anxiety. Whatever the case, Erica was able to find some support from some men on the gay scene.

Some of the guys accepted me. Some of the guys, I think, [...] found it sometimes quite difficult when I didn't conform [...]. Quite a few of the guys really hounded me. [...] A few guys were actually really OK with me being me. I remember one guy who got chatting to me one night and I didn't really know him before, he said 'so, are you gay or straight?' and I went [shrug] and he said 'oh, does it not matter?' And I said 'it doesn't matter'. So they kind of ... some people got the gist and most of the people who got the gist were the men. I can't really imagine one lesbian that was on the gay scene like that, but he was friendly to me and just accepted me.

Of course, Erica not only resisted orientation herself, she also 'corrupted' a nice gay boy with her perversion. This intensified the policing to which she was subjected. Efforts by others to maintain clear categories included trying to break up a relationship with her lover.

Jamie: Did you ever get in trouble for having a gay male lover from people on the gay scene?

Erica: Yeah. I haven't had direct verbal contact but I think a lot of the hostility was to do with that as well as the fact that I didn't conform and I think the fact that I was just a girl there who looked like a dyke but didn't define herself as a dyke and had a male lover who's supposed to be gay, that was enough. That was part of me not conforming. So I think the hostility was [...] mostly a lot of people talking behind my back and trying to convince my lover, at times when we were stressed together, which has happened a lot of the times, that we've been stressed together, trying to convince him that he was not happy with me and I was the wrong person for him and he was so much happier when he was picking up these perfect

strangers at a bar rather than when he was out with me, that I was miserable, that I'd had a problem with the gay people.

Erica's rejection of sexual orientation was intertwined with her anarchist politics. Her relational analysis of anarchism, focusing on free association, official and unofficial hierarchies and freedom of expression has been an important influence on my thinking about anarchism.

Jamie: What does it mean to you to not have a sexual orientation?

Erica: That I'm free, that I don't need to call myself anything and then call myself something else according to how I feel or not feel or what I do and who I do it with and whether I do anything at all, that it doesn't matter, that I'm just myself. It's great and it means that actually I think that's how it should be, that it should be fine for everybody to become attached to whoever, at whatever time and in whatever way and whatever level they want to without bothering. *It's like interpersonal relationships are sort of delicate enough without adding all these sort of obstacles* and it just becomes a sort of big obstacle race and it shouldn't be like that really. So, for me, actually, now and not having a sexual orientation that I identify with, also it ties in with my anarchist politics. I sort of see it as part of that really. I don't separate my politics from my thoughts and opinions about sexual orientation. It's all the same thing. (My emphasis.)

Jamie: How do you see the connection?

Erica: The freedom, the freedom to be yourself without any dictate from hierarchy because it's still hierarchy. It might be an unspoken hierarchy that dictates. Sometimes it is a spoken hierarchy. Sometimes it's the State that dictates what you should do and what you can do and what you can't do, according to who you fuck or who you love or whatever but it's just like all the unspoken hierarchy that I think are the worst ones anyway because they're the origin of the structure. Yeah, *all the sort of having to conform to certain things and what we lose, what we give up on just for the safety of conforming. [...] that's [...] part of what I'm really fighting against every day.* In all sorts of different levels, not just at a sexual level. But I don't separate sexuality from the rest of it. And I actually think my ... a lot of my more articulate anarchist thinking developed around the time that I was struggling with the gay scene and when I dropped out of it and I was getting my head around sexual orientation so it all actually developed quite simultaneously. (My emphasis.)

Jamie: So do you think being a victim of hierarchy in the gay scene led you towards anarchism or is that a ... or is it all kind of mixed up together?

Erica: Yeah, it's kind of mixed up together. I think ... I actually think I've always been an anarchist and I didn't have a word for it [...]. It's not that I



was the great believer in hierarchies and authorities and I really wanted to conform all my life and then something happened and I changed. I've always been like this. I've never actually fitted into anything. I've never matched any criteria. Particularly I've never conformed to much stuff or I've tried to, really suffered and then dropped out but I've never actually willingly done it or easily done it. [...] It doesn't mean that at some stage I read a book or something. And I get that a lot from people. They just think ... because suddenly I'm more articulate about my ideas, they think I've only just got my ideas. But I was kind of ... I have been really politically active here for about three years and so I see that as a result of all the fluff that went on in my [...] mid to late-20's and the sort of all the struggle with sexual orientation and the gay scene and that was part of that process.

On the topic of questioning and confusion, Erica pointed out the way in which it is nonconformity that is questioned, rather than why people conform. If the terms of the state-form are accepted, the nomadic life can only be interpreted as confusion. But Erica learned to recognise that her sexuality and sense of self were not the problem. It wasn't personal (individual), it was political (relational).

Erica: There was more questioning than confusion. It's like I've never really ... I don't think I've ever really been confused with myself. I was confused by all the stuff that I saw around me, like what you do with your identity once you've got it? Where do you put it? Where do you go with it? How do you present it? What does it get you in terms of what benefits? What trouble does it get you? Why the fuck do you do that in the first place? It was more like the general confusion with the way the sexuality was arranged within society rather than confusion with me. That's the other thing that I get ... I'm starting to get from people, the 'oh, you're just confused'. And I know that's a real stereotype thing. A lot of people get that. I'm not confused with myself. I was just as confused with the structures of sexual orientation around me as I am with all the other structures around me. I'm not confused because I do understand them. I can see why they're there and how they got there and why people stick to them to an extent but actually they don't mean anything to me and I think because I was sorting out my sexuality and my sort of sexual healing generally, that it was something that I was dealing with and it felt really important at the time because I thought 'oh, this is probably part of my healing and I need to sort it out'.

Again, Erica used spatial language to describe her changes. She physically left the gay scene, but she also left behind the sexual state-form at the same time. Or, as I suggested to her, 'You escaped.'

Erica: I escaped, yeah. I actually felt I was avoiding the problem that I

should be dealing with and I think that feeling lingered until I got involved with [a queer anarchist group] about a year and a half ago and I thought 'these people are normal. Wow!' It was just like suddenly I realised that there was really nothing wrong with me [...] and I'm all right because I met a huge load of people [...] who were all very different [...] but [...] they don't give a fuck about identity and that's so good. [...] *Nobody actually ever asked me what I was.* Nobody was interested. They were interested in me but they weren't interested in ... it was just like ... yeah. It took me a while to actually say my lover or whatever and he's whatever and [...] and actually all that was fine. I just sort of realised that nobody batted an eyelid and that people had their own lifestyles and when I saw other people's lifestyles and how open they were with that I just thought 'oh, it's OK. It's actually fine', because I was expecting so much aggression and questioning. I walked into the first meeting and was really expecting to like have to justify myself and describe myself and identify myself before I walked in the door. And I didn't have to do that. It was great. It was just like, yeah, it was nice. I just thought 'oh, I was right all along. I'm OK. I'm normal. I'm fine.' Normal is not about conforming to a norm. Normal as in all that sort of relaxed feeling that I get when I know that there's nothing wrong with me really and nice feelings.

[...] I remember being at [a queer anarchist] sex party and just being so happy because my lover was there somewhere and I was doing my thing and I knew he was doing his thing and then we got together at some time in the morning and I just thought 'oh, this so blissful'. [...] I felt 'this is OK. This is like just being ourselves and being together' and we hadn't had a dirty look from anybody. Yeah. That was nice.

### No Borders! (just boundaries)

Erica worked to resist borders -- national, sexual and otherwise. At the same time, a significant source of empowerment for Erica, and necessary to her overcoming the damage caused by domination, was her autonomous capacity to define boundaries. Freedom depends upon the capacity to say yes, no or anything else to a particular experience or relationship -- that is to establish boundaries for oneself. For Erica, specifically, her background of sexual abuse means that she was very aware of having been denied the capacity to say no. All generally not as traumatic as sexual abuse, authoritarian social organisation means that feeling incapable of saying no is a common experience.

Erica described how she had very little conscious memory of her childhood experiences of sexual abuse. Because of this, she found sexual experiences to be very disorienting. Boundaries enabled her to reclaim sexuality.

My first really sexual experience was to decide not to have sex. To just say 'no' to sex and it came out of fear and out of confusion and out of all sorts of shit but actually it was really affirming and sexual and made me feel really sexy because I realised that I couldn't really say 'yes' to sex without knowing what it was like to say 'no' kind of thing. So, yeah, so that was good. And I'm quite choosy about sex now. I very rarely ... its not that I don't experiment. I don't take chances but I very rarely enter into sex unless I've got a clear inkling that its going to be good because I'm not interested in any sex that's any less than like really, really good. I don't want boring sex anymore. I don't want any of that, or guilt sex or kind of street cred sex or ... I don't want any of that. I'm not interested. [...] I think that's one of things that I can't change, is that ... that was the beginning of my sex life. I can't do anything about that and what I can do is just make sure that its really good now, which I do.

Erica reclaimed sexuality by saying no to sex, much like street parties reclaim public space by saying no to the alienation caused by car culture and capitalism. In neither case is this a reclaiming of an essential presocial reality, but a redefinition of social relationships based on active consent rather than domination.

Erica also has firm boundaries when it comes to pain and power play.

I'm not into S&M in a big way. I'm not into bondage and that sort of fetish stuff and anything that involves any violence, like objects really freak me out. For a long time I wasn't into sex toys at all because using objects really freaked me out. Less so now. [...] But, yeah, mostly sort of violent domination stuff. I can really understand that some people are into it but I'm really not at all.

This maintenance of boundaries is consistent with nomadism; it allows for movement across borders without fear of repercussion, not a need to cross all borders. Nomadism is not a romanticisation of the transgressive. Nomadic relationships with particular boundaries may also change over time. They have for Erica and her partner.

[T]he other thing that really shapes our sex lives is that we've been abused and we've both got over it in our own way and it actually ... I think it shaped our sex life in a negative way in the past but now it's quite positive because it's about going 'oh, oh I can do that now'. And I didn't before but now I do. Maybe I'll try that one day. [...] and I don't see that as separate from my sexual orientation or my sexual identity because it's all the same thing.

Finally, Erica provided a powerful example of the benefit of playing with boundaries. In her case, it was a way to overcome her childhood sexual abuse.

[Getting together after a separation, we] hadn't slept together for probably about a year and it was kind of really difficult and then I talked a lot about my virginity stuff and how I didn't really feel that I'd lost my virginity. And I sort of realised that some of my thing of not having sex for months was that I was trying to get my virginity back so that I could lose it and I'd done that for years and how bored I was with that. [...] So it was really nice because we did this sort of teenage thing where we just like really courted each other for ages and we just went a bit further every time and that was very sexy. That was really sexy. And maybe that's nothing to do with the sexual orientation but it was just so unique to our relationship, that we could do that, that we could both do that, that we were like on the same level with that and it was great and it really worked as well.

## Conclusions

Erica's story, and her own analysis, is highly compatible with the anarchist poststructuralist framework I outlined in Chapter Three. Her experiences of sexual borders and policing, growing up and on the gay scene, highlight the State-like character of sexual orientation. They also demonstrate the decentralised nature of power. If we were to think of a State-centred gay and lesbian lobbying organisation as the gay equivalent of the State apparatus, then a centralised notion of power would suggest that gay policing would be done by employees of Stonewall in the same way that police are employed by the State apparatus. However, this policing is clearly decentralised, though perhaps concentrated in particular locations (e.g. gay bars). Furthermore, this policing, which continuously produces the borders of state-forms, depends upon a violation of anarchist poststructuralist ethics against representation. The emotional violence was clear in Erica's experiences of being represented as 'closet lesbian' and 'dopey straight, blonde straight girl'. Erica's capacity to name herself, her autonomy, was continuously denied. Furthermore, her partner's capacity to choose his relationships was also challenged. This process was, in Erica's words, 'the total opposite of solidarity', or perhaps more explicitly, the opposite of anarchy. Despite this intensive policing, Erica continued to resist. One of the most inspiring, and important, lessons I have learned from my participants' stories is that resistance is always possible, but also always difficult. Resistance requires a sense of power, and Erica was losing hers on the gay scene. At least, that is how I interpreted her understated comment 'people's prejudice started getting to me a

bit but then when that happened I moved away.' Given the great sense of relief she describes when moving on to a queer anarchist scene, I feel this interpretation is justifiable. The anarchist activism, within the context of a supportive network, provided Erica (nomadic) space within which to redevelop a sense of power and, simultaneously, a sense of well-being.

Ken Plummer (1995) argued that the classic coming out story is a linear narrative characteristic of modern storytelling. This narrative suggests that empowerment is a state to be achieved through the act of coming out and revealing one's true self. While coming out is radically empowering for many people, representation of gay, lesbian or bisexual identity as an endpoint fixes the self and halts the process of empowerment. I suggest instead that stories such as Mark's and Erica's illustrate the non-linearity of life. The nomadism of these stories is in their process based on continuous resistance (to continuous policing), supported by and producing, continuous empowerment. This ongoing nomadic practice of resistance is consistent with anarchist ethics of relationships. Mark did not begin to resist when he decided that he could have sex with Steven on his own terms, but, he did begin to get much better at it. Instead of taking heroin and hiding from older men following him home from school, Mark was enjoying powerful relationships that resist categorisation. Likewise, Erica did not begin to resist when she found her anarchist group, but she became more effective. She describes this in terms of her thinking about anarchist politics, 'because suddenly I'm more articulate about my ideas, they think I've only just got my ideas'. To present these stories as periods of policing ended through resistance, enabled by empowerment would be to fall into the same trap as identity politics.

If the linear coming out story is a hallmark stories of sexual identity politics, then the nomadic narratives of Mark and Erica are exemplary stories of sexual anarchy. These stories are characterised by the intertwined processes of policing, resistance and empowerment consistent with the anarchist poststructuralist framework I outlined in Chapter Three. The 14 other stories are explored over the course of three chapters focusing on each of the three processes in turn. These can never be separated, as I have illustrated in my analysis of Mark and Erica's stories. Resistance always accompanies policing (Foucault, 1980, 1990), even if it is not always very effective. And the factors that encourage resistance are acts of resistance in themselves. Finally, this analysis aims not only to provide grounding for anarchist politics of sexuality, but to demonstrate the extent to which sexual anarchy already exists. This best begins by analysing the State-like nature of 'sexual orientation'.



## Chapter Six

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### Policing the Borders: Sexual State-Forms in Action

*His vision, from the constantly passing bars,  
has grown so weary then it cannot hold  
anything else. It seems to him that there are  
a thousand bars; and behind bars, no world.*

-- Rilke, *The Panther*

*Columbine is a clean, good place except for those  
rejects. Sure we teased them. What do you  
expect with kids who come to school with weird  
hairdos and horns on their hats? It's not just the  
jocks; the whole school's disgusted with them.  
They're a bunch of homos, grabbing each others'  
private parts. If you want to get rid someone,  
usually you tease 'em. So the whole school would  
call them homos, and when they did something  
sick, we'd tell them 'you're sick and that's wrong'.*

-- 255 lb American-football-playing  
Columbine High School student quoted in  
*Time Magazine*

Sexual orientation can be understood as being very similar to government. Both involve representation, borders and policing. Not only are they similar, but they are mutually sustaining. I use Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the state-form to understand the ongoing production of sexual orientation as a micro-political process consistent with the State. Obedience to the borders of the state-form is encouraged to mechanisms of shame and violence. Just as the State depends upon numerous state-forms for its existence, so sexual orientation as state-form is also an effect of others state-forms. In addition to examining compulsory sexual orientation, in this chapter I also analyse participants' experiences of homonormative gendering and compulsory monogamy. Finally, I demonstrate how queer, developed as a nomadic alternative to rigid identificatory categories, can itself become reified, become a state-form.

## Shame

Humans are social beings who depend upon social bonds for our identities and well-being. Damage to those social bonds results in feelings of shame. According to Thomas Scheff (1990), feeling ashamed of that shame then results in an intense fear of further damaging of social bonds and consequently rigid conformity, a condition he calls 'pathological shame'. Rigid conformity must necessarily leads to damaging of social bonds with those who do not conform, potentially treating a cyclical relationship of shame and fear. This theory has some explanatory power when it comes to understanding the ongoing production of sexual orientation categories. This is clearly the case in participants' narratives, though the terminology of 'shame' is not often explicitly used. Indeed, according to Scheff it wouldn't be if people were ashamed of that shame. And, as I suggested in Chapter Three, people living in hierarchical societies are likely to be; hierarchies of mind over body, masculine over feminine, and rational over emotional are integral to relationships of leaders over followers. So, while I can only offer a few explicit references to shame, I suggest that it is intertwined with the emotionally difficult experiences described throughout this chapter.

While constructing a clear line between pathological and non-pathological shame is probably impossible, I have identified some descriptions of shame from my interviews that I would suggest are closer to Scheff's description of 'normal shame' than to the 'pathological'. The first comes from Mark talking about going out with the intention of queerbashing during his macho homophobic period. He said, 'we never found any queers to bash, thank God. I'm embarrassed about that now'. While the motivation to go out queer bashing seems likely to have stemmed from pathological shame, the shame/regret/embarrassment that he felt during the interview seems to me to be the effect of having intended to damage social bonds (and bodies). I got the impression that he might have also feared damaging his social bond with me, that I would judge him badly for having done this. Meg, who described herself as 'remarkably unscarred', provided a couple of examples of (non-pathological) shame resulting from the poor negotiation of boundaries.

The only two things I can think of are tiny. One is not managing non-monogamy well when I've let someone get a bit hurt. So the time when my lover, several years-standing boyfriend at the time, let himself in to the house with his own key, with a bunch of flowers for me one Sunday morning and caught me in bed with my flatmate. [...] That was really ...



it's a regret and a ... ohhh. And the only other one is where I had sex ... no, a couple of times ... twice actually. Once having sex with this woman who ... I was too tired. We had an amazing day and a bit of a wonderful drug-themed festival, came back and she was also an ex-student of mine. [...] It wasn't great and the next day she was all ... I was a bit embarrassed and she was all perky [...]. So it was because it was uneven. So even though [...] we didn't have an age difference. She wasn't anymore a student. She was a student somewhere where I'd only been doing a very little bit of part-time teaching so even though in that way the different ... the imbalance was minimised, there was actually an imbalance of interest that I should have been a bit more ...

Her third example is similar in that she seemed unsure about appropriateness of her actions in terms of her boundaries/bond with an old friend.

No, the closest to guilty is having a sexual relationship ... OK, with a friend who was the ex-boyfriend of a good friend of mine at university but things long since had finished between them so it's not a betrayal. It's just a little bit of a ... I'm a little bit embarrassed about that. And she goes 'well, you'd know about him. You've slept with him since I have', and I feel a little bit cringey. Everybody knows she's ... neither of them ... the two of them don't desire each other anymore.

The social nature of shame is made clear here with her reference to everybody knowing that this relationship was long over, that, implicitly, the ex-boyfriend was 'available' and, thus, her action was not a betrayal. But, at the same time, it was an undefined 'little bit of a ...'. This last example is not necessarily a poor negotiation of boundaries, but a difficult situation where boundaries were not clear.

More 'pathological' experiences of shame provide an emotional basis for the existence of sexual state-forms, and are thus to be found, implicitly, throughout this chapter. I also explicitly asked all participants about experiences of feeling 'guilty, embarrassed or ashamed about something to do with sex'. I offer here four examples of shame that resulted from breaking borders. Note how the use of language -- concepts such as difference, defense, justification, and apology -- indicate participants' experiences of borders. In this first example, Meg did not find her desires fitting within the box of appropriate teenage female sexuality.

I always felt sexually different as a teenager but just because I thought I was obsessed and must have landed from Mars to want so much ... to want to wank so much for a girl but that's partly because you don't hear about that.

Likewise, Diane felt embarrassed about her childhood sex play and, more recently, anxious about reactions to her same-sex desires.

I know there was ... play and stuff as a youngster, before I'd articulated sexuality and stuff like that, had a sexual element and I felt a little bit embarrassed about it, felt a bit awkward about it because I hadn't quite sort of identified that it was about sex and that I wasn't necessarily comfortable identifying that it was about sex. Yeah, that's the most sort of striking example of that I suppose. I think I was probably a little bit apologetic when I first came out as gay. 'I'm gay. Don't worry. I don't fancy you' kind of thing. Worried that people were going to say 'oh shit'.

Anita's greatest source of sexual shame was her erotic pleasure in sadomasochistic practices, so often constructed as beyond the borders of 'normal' sex. Both of her other 'deviant' identities, lesbian and polyamorous, are better supported through social networks.

[T]he fact that I'm not out to my family or my sister or people at work or whatever about being into SM, which I guess is part of sex. [...] When I first come out to somebody [...], I'm still a little bit scared inside of what they're going to say. [...] but coming out to someone about being into SM .... Yeah, I still struggle with the whole SM aspect, I must admit. [...] it's difficult to say 'yes, I'm into pain and I don't see anything wrong with it' because I don't know many other people that say that and so I don't think ... whereas I am, in a lot of ways, in a very lesbian subculture [...]. Almost all of my friends are gay or queer in some way, either lesbian or bi or gay or whatever. [...] and so it's constantly reinforced that there's nothing wrong with that, [...] and to some extent that's true with poly as well and I can justify that in a very theoretical argument to myself to but I can't justify SM in that same way.

Sandra, on the other hand, felt defensive about her transgression of lesbian purity -- having a male partner -- for which she had been punished in the past.

I think that made me ultra-sensitive to that kind of thing and so I have actually said to some people 'I do love him, you know'. Like trying to justify and defend it and whatever but that's come from me in response to friends saying ... feeling that I was a traitor in the past, not necessarily because of *it* happening repeatedly from other people.

In each of these cases, 'pathological shame' acts as an agent of self policing. The shame, though, is originally the result of other forms of policing. In each of these examples, policing

came in the form of discursive violence. These could be understood in terms of repressive silences: silences surrounding female sexuality, childhood sex play, homosexuality, sadomasochism and bisexuality. This has been the general approach of identity politics, with its emphasis on making visible the invisible and speaking the unspeakable. However, as Foucault reminds us, this only partially addresses discursive mechanisms of control. He wrote,

Silence itself -- the things one declines to say, or is forbidden to name, the discretion that is required between different speakers -- is less the absolute limit of discourse, the other side from which is separated by a strict boundary, than an element that functions alongside the things said, with them and in relation to them within over-all strategies (1990:27).

In other words, the constructions of what is possible or desirable are intertwined with constructions of what is impossible or undesirable, and, both are produced through discourses that include silences.

## **Sexual Violence**

Sexual policing through discursive violence is perhaps most blatant in public experiences of verbal assault. Several participants' stories demonstrate that policing does not necessarily relate to the 'identity' of the target of policing, as the identity politics approach of viewing queer-bashing as a sexual minority issue would suggest. Sandra's story of having been aggressively labelled in various ways provides a particularly good example.

It was weird because in one day I could be called a faggot with them thinking I was a guy and then that afternoon, walking past a construction site, 'hey baby!' It's like OK you yell at me when you think I'm a guy. You yell at me when you think I'm a woman. Was yelled at walking down the street with a friend, a straight female friend and 'hey! You lesbians' blah, blah, blah.

Sandra's experience was not unique. Kev and Laurence both described instances of verbal queer-bashing without feeling as though they had given any indication of sexual identity or practise.

Kev: there's times that I've just gone to the toilet and it's known to be a

cottage, and all I'm doing is standing taking a piss, when I've gone out, I've had people ... like I had some council workmen who shouted 'queer' at me as I came out the toilets.

Laurence: There's specifically one member of staff [at a previous workplace who] consistently referred to me as 'wee gay faggot' anytime he spoke to me in the entire duration of my time working at [this business] until he met me face-to-face he didn't stop. He wouldn't do it to my face but any time he spoke to me on the phone, he called me 'wee gay faggot'. [...] I'm still getting grief any time I walk pass a building site for some reason. I don't really understand it. I don't think I look in any way really outlandish or outrageous. I don't really dress that strangely. [...] sometimes I get wolf-whistles or I get ... I've had 'faggot' and stuff shouted at me when I've walked past.

Anne described experiences of verbal queer-bashing for other forms of nonconformity -- not being 'heterosexual enough' and for being 'alternative' more generally.

Anne: Eh, once me and my then partner [...], he had long blond curly hair and I had short dark hair, and we were walking down the street and somebody mistook us for a couple, a lesbian couple and shouted some abuse, but yeah, no, I think no is the answer overall. [...] It was just kids, and I, I mean they might not even have thought we were a lesbian couple. I think they might have been taking the piss out of the fact that Chris had long hair and I had short hair. [...] And neither of us were really fitting the mould in that way.

Like national borders and authority, sexual state-forms may be policed through physical violence. Mark and Erica, whose stories were explored in the previous chapter, were not the only participants to have experienced overt sexual violence. Anita also has been physically assaulted. These forms of policing are perhaps the most blatantly violent ways in which sexual state-forms are maintained.

Anita described her experiences of being queer-bashed and harassed, and the shame she felt for allowing this to frighten her into a degree of conformity.

Anita: I mean the first time somebody shouted at me in the street, it was a little bit scary but now I'm quite used to people shouting in the street although I still find it unpleasant obviously and scary. It's happened before and I survived. It'll happen again and I will still survive [...] But you get used to it. And I think, yeah, I think you do, you get harder as you get used to being ... you get used to putting on a defensive shell when you go out [...] If you look straight you don't get it so much. Believe me, I've had this

conversation with many people and people that I think are quite dykey [...] have said to me that they've never been harassed for being a dyke and that's happened ... I'm like, wow! It's happened to me a lot. I guess it's a lot of body language and stuff as well.

Jamie: Are there any particular instances that stick out or is this just general background?

Anita: Mostly general background but also when I was just coming out, I did get attacked and I got a couple of punches by a gang of guys when I was walking down the street in my leather jacket and you know, that sort of thing. But I sort of ... well I don't take it for granted but I was armed with the knowledge that that can happen, had happened and will happen again, no doubt. And so I'm always quite surprised when other dykes say to me they've never had any abuse. Wow! You're lucky!

Jamie: How did you deal with that? By becoming harder?

Anita: I think you do. I think you have to because otherwise if you let it get to you, you'd never go out by yourself or you'd never hold any girlfriend's hand in the street and ... I mean now there are ... certainly I make a considered decision about where I am, who's around me, what the feeling is like, before I would hold my girlfriend's hand in the street because I've been attacked and I don't want to be attacked again but at the same time I feel ashamed that I don't just do it [...] which is sad but what can I say? I'm only 5' 2". That's my excuse.

Jamie: Do you need an excuse?

Anita: Yeah because, politically, I believe that I should be ... I should ... if I'm with somebody, I should hold hands with them because straights do it all the time and don't think about it and they should see gay people doing that and then it wouldn't be such a big deal for everybody else that comes after us. So, politically, I believe that, yes, I should be. So, yeah, I do feel ashamed when I don't.

## **Compulsory Sexual Orientation**

The mechanisms of shame and violence described above do not simply function to produce heteronormativity or a compulsory heterosexuality. The impact of feminist, gay and lesbian, bisexual, and transgender and queer politics, in all of their variation, has resulted in popular awareness of alternatives to normative heterosexuality. Of course, these alternatives are still arranged hierarchically, according to contextual conditions. Furthermore, the possible alternatives are often presented as limited to more egalitarian and less permanent forms of heterosexuality, homosexuality, and increasingly, though by no means entirely accepted as

even possible, bisexuality. Recognition of nomadic sexual possibilities, much less realities, is still exceedingly limited. Thus, I argue, the mechanisms of shame and violence, in many contexts, produce what might be called compulsory sexual orientation. We must all fit into one of the two, or increasingly three, boxes of gender-defined relationships, desires and sexual behaviours. The reality that the relationship between sexual identity and sexual behaviour does not necessarily confine itself to this system has been highlighted through research on the epidemiology of HIV (e.g., Lear, 1995; Zea et al, 2003). Despite this awareness, sexual orientation remains 'the truth of the self' (Foucault, 1990) or a supposedly 'necessary fiction' (Weeks, 1995).

As I argued earlier, the existence of compulsory sexual orientation depends directly upon two other formations: the production of naturalised binary gender and fear or anxiety about sexuality (erotophobia), including consequent disciplinary practices. The first is emphasised in feminist critiques of heterosexuality. In suggesting an emphasis on a compulsory sexual orientation, I do not offer of it as a replacement of queer/feminist analyses of heteronormativity, compulsory heterosexuality (Rich, 1999 [1979]), or heterosexual matrix (Butler, 1990). But, homosexualities, too, depend upon gender division and can produce homonormative genderings. The relationship between erotophobia and compulsory sexual orientation has been discussed in earlier sections on sexual shame. So, here I focus on examples of homonormative gendering.

### Homonormative genderings

The first is a relatively harmless example in which Eva talked about the inability of others to recognise certain aspects of her gender performance. As with all participants, I asked her how she related to a series of gendered labels including 'camp'.

Jamie: Is there any way in which you could be described as [...] camp?

Eva: [...] camp? That would be great. [...] except most people can't really work out that a woman can be camp so it doesn't really happen very much.

Jamie: So you'd think of yourself as camp but you think people don't see you as camp?

Eva: Slightly sometimes but nobody notices.

Eva described an ongoing difficulty with the binary construction of gender and was frustrated that camp seems to be reserved for boys.

Anita experiences have been more difficult. She identifies as a poly, switch dyke. In other words, she is interested having multiple sexual partners simultaneously, enjoys sadomasochistic play (giving and receiving pain, thus switch) and has only so far been sexually attracted to women. The SM dyke scene in her area is organised around butch, femme and transgender identities, none of which Anita identifies with.

I'm not tall enough and I don't wear enough butch clothes. And at my height ... I'm 5' 2". I look cute regardless of what I wear. I can wear all leather and I still look cute. [...] And I'm not thin. I don't have long hair. I don't wear dresses and things just because ... not for any particular reason, just because I don't wear dresses particularly. So people tend to look at me and go 'don't know, butch, femme just stay away'. And I actually heard someone say that to me once. I was ... went to a gender identity workshop and I did a conference that I was at, an SM conference, and they were talking about gender identity, identifying as butch or femme or transgender or whatever and I said 'look, I don't identify as any of these things', and people turned around at me and said 'well, how do you play then? Because if you don't identify as butch or femme or transgender, how do you know who to play with and what role to take and stuff like that?' And I was like 'whoa! I know you all identify very strongly but the whole point of ... ' well, OK, that's not quite true but, for me, one of the points of being at an SM conference is that you're outside of all of these boxes. You shouldn't have to fit into a box because you're already so far out on the horizon that ... you know, you shouldn't have to label yourself and yet I was talking to people and they said 'I wouldn't play with you because I don't know how you identify because I can't tell from how you're presenting yourself'. And I was like 'oh, no wonder I'm not getting so many dates.' [...] I don't know anybody in the lesbian SM scene that doesn't identify as butch, femme, transgender really, really strongly -- really strong gender identities going on.

Anita emphasised the rigidity of gender identity on this scene.

Anita: I don't do gender play because I don't identify as a gender. It would be easier if I did it because so much of the scene is based around gender play but I can but try but it just doesn't work. I mean look at me. It's just not a happening thing, is it?

Jamie: So is the gender play kind of around fixed play ... with fixed genders?

Anita: Fixed genders. The gender doesn't move.

Jamie: Right, so you can't play butch or femme because you're not butch or femme?

Anita: Yeah. And you can't play butch one night and femme another night, which I could try doing that because I could be quite fun but ...

Jamie: ... against the rules.

Anita: Yeah, against the rules.

Jamie: Wow!

Anita: The whole switch thing, it's ... there's not many top/bottom switches. For me, it's gender switch as well. Because I don't identify as a gender, I can play with being butch. I can play dressing up butch. I can play dressing up femme.

Jamie: But then what happens if you do that? If it's against the rules, what's the punishment for breaking the rules?

Anita: People look at you and they can tell. That's sounds paranoid but I'm not projecting a gender identity. I can be wearing a dress but I still won't look like a femme [...]. And people will look at me and go ... again, 'I don't know who you are. I'm not talking to you'. Yeah. I'm sounding like I'm being picked on and I don't feel like I'm being picked on. I'm just sort of pointing out that there's quite a big difference in the gender identities going on. [...] You know, if it was up to me I wouldn't dress up to try and fit into a role. If it was me I would just be wearing jeans and a t-shirt.

Anita's narrative described an example of a homonormative compulsory gender regime in which she has been sanctioned. This is not to return to arguments of against butch-femme desire as a reproduction of heterosexuality. Indeed, Anita also described butch-butuh sex play modelled on gay male SM culture. Rather than criticising gendered play and gendered desire, I am concerned about the rigidity of gender and sexuality and the exclusions that this produces. To draw a comparison to heteronormativity, we might think of the ways in which intersexed, androgynous or otherwise gender-variant people are likely to be excluded or otherwise policed, especially when sex is involved. I would suggest that Anita's situation is comparable.

Anita described another example of gender policing in a former relationship.

I had an ex that I was with for seven or eight years and she was very femme and she was attracted exclusively to butch women and she was always at me to look more butch and to identify more butch and if I wore a skirt or something like that, she'd be like ... so, yeah.



Here we can see the similarity between homonormative gender policing and its more documented and theorised heteronormative counterpart. Setting Anita's example next to Sandra's experience makes the comparison clear.

[O]ne of the reasons that my first relationship with a guy broke up was because he felt threatened by my sexuality and that was a hard one because I expected to be with him until I was 80 and I never lied to him. [...] And so there was never deception, but 2½ years in, he decided that ... he felt too threatened. I cut my hair. I used to have really long hair when I met him and when I cut my hair, people used to start screaming 'faggot!' at us when we walked down the street and then I started wearing dresses for him and they'd say 'who's the fag in the skirt?' And then I started to grow my hair long, which I didn't want to do but wanted to do anything to save the relationship and at that point it was beyond salvation really because he wouldn't talk to me about it. He just said 'no, I can't do this anymore. You're going to kill me because I'm going to have a heart attack and die from the stress.' And I was like 'whoa! It's time to leave then.' And so I left and that was a hard one.

In both cases, the participants' partners seem to have had rigidly gendered sexual identities. Of course, these identities were not purely individual -- perhaps if Sandra's ex partner had not been queer-bashed, he might have been perfectly happy with her gender expression. Likewise, Anita's ex partner's femme identity might have depended on her being seen with a butch. Regardless of the interpersonal complexities of these situations, we can see the interdependence between compulsory gender and sexually oriented identities<sup>10</sup>.

### Homonormative policing in gay spaces

The continuous production of gender division is only one of the mechanisms by which the hetero-homo division is produced. Other aspects of individual appearance and practice are also policed. Many of the participants' stories included experiences of homonormative policing within gay spaces. Beth had been heavily involved in organising an LGBT group up until just before she met her (male) partner.

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10 Lesbian, gay and bisexual are not the only gendered sexual orientation identities possible. Butch-femme desire, desire for androgyny or transgenders, male desire for lesbian genders, female attraction to gay masculinities are just a few other possibilities, any of which could potentially develop into rigid identity categories.

Nobody believes me on this one but I did actually pull back out of that stuff before I met my partner and the thing is I'd pulled back three days before I met him. [I had other commitments and] I didn't really have time to sort of keep up with it [...] so I resigned and then three days later I met my partner. [...] I was starting to ditch interests left, right and centre because I ... I had a life that was full of stuff. I didn't have space for a partner sort of thing, and [the LGBT group] was one of the things to go.

Beth had a difficult time because her friends in the LGBT group thought she had left it because of her new 'heterosexual' relationship. This emphasised her concerns about LGBT politics.

I think that generally the politics of these things is too exclusive. You have to be the right kind of queer to fit in and even down to sometimes you have to have the right kind of clothes and things like that and I've always really hated that and I found that when I was at uni [...]. It was like that. It was very exclusive and it was for people who definitely knew what their sexuality was and whatever and I have a real problem with that. When I was the [involved in organising the group], I tried to make it as friendly as I could to people who were ... didn't know exactly what their sexuality was, who didn't fit in on the scene and whatever and I just tried to make it very friendly and open.

When Beth returned to visit the group, she found it very difficult because she didn't fit into the stereotypes.

But, to be honest, when I went back and I'd kind of lost touch and things, it was really ... it did still seem quite nice. It did still seem quite friendly and stuff. [But] I just didn't know anyone and I didn't have that much in common. Again, I think queer people are as guilty of it as anybody else. They kind of make assumptions about what you're doing and whatever. It was hard to have to go back in and explain to them 'no, actually, I live with a bloke' and all this kind of stuff. You see people kind of going 'oh right' and not that interested to know you.

Beth's changing relationship with this particular LGBT group parallels other changes in her life at this time. Her relationship with a man who does not identify with queer encouraged her to get out of queer politics, though this was something she was concerned about getting burnt out on anyway. At the same time as she was excluded from a queer world, she was embraced by a 'straight' one. Her marriage with her partner seems to have been a catalyst in

this change.

It doesn't really make a huge difference to our relationship but I find people's reaction to it is really strange. People have quite changed their reaction to us. I find some people are less ... I don't know, less friendly. They'll invite us out to fewer things and all my friends, who went and got married, are kind of phoning up again and it's quite odd. It's like as if you've moved into something else and we didn't really think that we had. It's a wee bit different for us because we got married more or less so my partner could get his work permit so we didn't like marry for romantic reasons or whatever. [...] We stayed together for romantic reasons . We got married because so we could stay together. [...] my parents, for example, think it's wonderful and they've started to treat us quite differently and they've started to treat me more like an adult and I guess I could have predicted that but I was ... yeah, I was surprised by ... I was especially surprised to have people start getting in touch again and wanting to go out and stuff, like we've been ... we're getting pulled into this social circle of married people.

Needless to say, these changes were quite difficult for Beth. In particular, losing queer friendships was hard.

Others also described feelings of alienation in gay spaces. Phyllis described her difficulties exploring her desires towards women because of border policing.

I'd feel a complete fraud ... that was the other thing that was stopping me doing anything about wanting to be with women because I was like I know I'm not lesbian and how can I go to a lesbian club and what are they going to think of me? So you feel like a fraud.

Despite her fears, she felt drawn to lesbian clubs as a visible space in which to explore sexuality with women. At the same time, she felt uncomfortable trying to become a clubber in order to be queer. Pete, who does not identify with LGBT or Q, said he would not once to go into a gay bar because 'I would feel like an alien'. Likewise, Eva, who identifies as bi or queer, finds gay bars very difficult.

The amount of times I haven't been given entry to gay clubs is alarming and as far as I can tell I don't really understand it. I don't know what I'm supposed to be. I think that I don't look straight or gay. I don't know what you think or whatever but I don't look very butch and I don't look very femme or anything and there's nothing particularly about me that screams whatever sexual orientation, I think. [A friend] says that I'm the only person she knows that actually looks bi, which is fine by me but I don't

think people generally think that. But I've known straight girls that got into gay clubs no problem who were very femme and whatever, and then butch dykes, yeah, because they look so obviously dykey, obviously they might not be but they basically look really blatantly queer. They get in fine but me, I still don't. I kind of wind up going 'yeah, fuck it, I don't want to go in there anyway', which is true because [...] it is a horrible place but it's after 1:00 and everything else is shut and your friends are all going in there then you'd kind of like to be able to join them. [...] But at the same time part of me is a bit crap and just really wants to prove myself and sort of say 'look, I'm queer too' and stuff like that because well, yeah. But I don't understand it because if I'm in a gay bar and I look around, I don't decide that the person next to me is straight because they look like whatever. If they're in a queer bar, I'd just assume that they're queer but I don't know if people do that with me or if everybody else just sees it that way or what? [...] and I've heard like ... people have been saying 'oh I was at this gay bar last weekend and there was this straight couple and they were all over each other'. Well first of all maybe they weren't straight but anyway ... but I'm like wow! God! I'd never have had the nerve to do that in a gay bar. I could be all over a girlfriend in some straight-type place but I couldn't have the nerve in a gay bar.

This became even more difficult for either when she began dating a boy.

Eva: I'd love to take him out with me [on the scene] and maybe I will but if I do, you can be guaranteed that I'll be looking over my shoulder the whole time worrying, which is dreadful and I really don't want to do that but the truth is I'd always be more comfortable taking a girlfriend to a so-called straight place than taking a boyfriend to a gay place because at least if I take a girlfriend to a straight place and people are assholes, I feel like I've got the right to turn round and say 'well, fuck you!' and just deal with it. But I don't feel quite as confident in a gay place to assert myself.

Jamie: Why is that, do you think?

Eva: I'm not sure. I mean, I know that for some gay people, not necessarily all of them, I don't know what the proportion is, but for some of them they don't think that bi people should really be that welcome there and stuff like that, in the same way that they are not going to welcome straight people being there. But I don't know ... I should be able to turn round and just deal with it if that happens but I don't know, and it also might come across as a lot more subtle than someone being as asshole in a straight place.

The differences between heteronormative and homonormative policing for Eva seems to break down into two elements. First, overt harassment in straight spaces is much easier to address than her experiences of subtle policing of gay spaces. Second, it seems difficult for Eva to challenge the norms of a group with which she identifies. This second aspect is clarified in her

description of feeling ambivalent about Pride events.

Eva: [...] sometimes there's kind of a bit of piss-taking of straight people and I've heard of bi people, although I've not been around when they've done that but ... so it depends very much on who the speaker is and stuff like that. I don't know. It's very kind of ... I know it's really LGBT pride these days but for most people it means gay pride so it doesn't feel like necessarily my thing.

Jamie: But sort of.

Eva: Sort of, yeah. I always consider myself at least to be a *second cousin* of it or something, whereas I don't feel like that about straight people, which is kind of weird. [...] Heterosexuality is] so default that it's never even questioned and it's so kind of privileged, not that I'm not and stuff like that but it's just something that's never challenged and the rest of us have to work through a lot of things. So I can feel that kind of thing in common with queer people, which is silly because a lot of them might be completely vacant. [...] I don't know; because I'd much rather hang out with a straight person who's really clued in and everything than a vacant disco bunny or something. But when it's put into like big abstract world, I'd rather the queer ones. [My emphasis.]

Beth, Pete, Phyllis and Eva all described experiences of policing and exclusion in gay spaces, as did Mark and Erica in the previous chapter. Their stories illustrated the state-like nature of gay and lesbian identities. Overcoding, which Deleuze and Guattari (1997:199) refer to as 'the operation that constitutes the essence of the State', is the process of judging practices in terms of certain identificatory categories. In this case, those categories make up what we refer to as 'sexual orientation'. As I argued earlier in this chapter, these categories are produced through shame and violence. This violence is representation -- claiming the authority to define for another how to behave or live. To conclude this section on the risk of homonormativity in gay spaces, I'll share Sandra's discussion of gay policing and how she negotiates it.

Sandra: I haven't been, to my knowledge, but I have been concerned about that. I cannot remember many times going to a gay club with my male partner or a gay bar or whatever but I think that, in those occasions, I probably stepped even further away from him so to be seen as friends rather than in a relationship because I didn't want ... because I don't trust myself if somebody was to like confront me with 'you're not queer enough'. *I'm not good with authority.* [My emphasis.]

## **Compulsory Sexual Orientation Identity**

As Mark and Erica's stories in the previous chapter demonstrated, resistance to compulsory sexual orientation is met with intensive policing. Although their stories were exceptional in their extremes of both policing and resistance, several other participants explicitly described the effects of failing to conform to sexual orientation state-forms. Kev described his ongoing difficulties with sexual orientation, including looking back on his feelings in adolescence and early adulthood.

I might want to try [sex with a man]. This is a sexual fantasy. I can never be romantically entangled with a man so I'm not really gay still. I suppose it was a straight identity then. And then it was this whole, well, maybe I am gay. Oh, no, I'm not. It just went back and forth a while and then I sort of found out about bisexual ... I thought 'wow'. It seemed closest at the time to what I was thinking, that you could like both people. You didn't have to go to one ... gay or straight. And at the time there was lots of things like bi lists and bi newsgroups and bi groups and so on, which I went to a couple but [...] the only thing I had in common with them was the sexual behaviour sometimes and I didn't really get into the politics of it because I couldn't be arsed. Yeah, most people there were there because they all sort of banded together for strength and had a chip on their shoulders at the time. [...] I never thought of it as being identity. [...] I was just thinking about sex with men and in those days you couldn't just be a man who had sex with men or anything like that. It was always just this whole lifestyle choice.

Kev did benefit from finding out about the possibility of bisexuality, because it had provided him with an alternative to the binary options he had been presented with in the past. While it fits better than either a gay or straight, he rejected and continues to reject a bisexual identity -- 'I'm not a bisexual but I can be bisexual.' He was not interested in bisexual categories, communities or politics. Sexual state-forms, however, do not allow for this nomadic approach. Rejecting sexual orientation identity continues to be difficult for Kev.

Jamie: Are there other labels that you've used or sometimes use now?

Kev: Not really, no. I mean if people ask me ... actually if people ask me if I'm gay, then I say I've got a male partner [...] but I sort of try to not say any one particular label. I describe [...] my situation in life as opposed to the label. I very occasionally use 'queer' when talking about ... I wouldn't usually say I was queer but I've talked about other things being queer, like queer life or queer stuff in general. OK, it's not really me.

Jamie: So if someone does kind of press you on it and you say well,

actually I have a male partner, and they say 'well, doesn't that mean you're gay?', how do you respond to that?

Kev: It depends how bolshie I'm feeling at the time. I once said 'no, but I can be attracted to women as well', [to] which [...] they say 'then obviously you're bi'. I'll say 'OK, that's close enough'. And if they question me further then ... most people just leave it there because they're not really interested. *They just want to have you set in their eyes as what you are.* Occasionally if someone said you're gay because I've said I've got a male partner, and I'll say 'well, I wouldn't describe myself as gay' and if they say 'why not?' I'd say 'because it's too restrictive' and usually inaccurate as well. If they don't, then I might as well go to ... again, for most people, it's just really 'don't call me gay, I don't like it.' [ ... and talking to some people on an online gay chat room] you've got to admit you're something and it can't be too weird [...] and people keep pushing at you to say 'well, are you this or this?' And if you don't say it it's like 'well, you're just being awkward'. And you do that and it's funny how they're so desperate to have you set as one thing or the other because then they can work out whether you are available, I think. [My emphasis.]

Kev's refusal to pick a box seems to raise anxiety among people who expect him to be sexually oriented. His failure to conform to this seems to upset their notions of a (sexually) ordered world.

The following exchange with Douglas further supports my analysis of the crucial role of emotions -- particularly shame and anxiety -- in maintaining the sexual state-forms of compulsory sexual orientation.

Jamie: So you don't fit into any boxes?

Douglas: [LAUGHS] Oh, God!

Jamie: Is it difficult?

Douglas: It's hell. [...] Yeah, sometimes I would just love a box. Oh, how I would love a box.

Jamie: So what's the feeling about the box?

Douglas: Oh, just having something that you can say ... I mean everybody else sticks their hand up and says 'I'm this. I'm that. I'm this one and I've got friends over there and they're all shouting for this.' That would be wonderful. [...] it hasn't been easy and there are times when it feels absolutely impossible.

Jamie: Like when? Any examples that come to mind?

Douglas: When it's ghastly. When I feel I want a shortcut way of saying to someone ... I'll often say to someone that you'll have to accept there's not a straightforward answer. Just take it or leave it. That's it. [...] I and for most people, that's actually all right. I feel sad that I haven't been able to talk to my elder brother although I think he knows and accepts. I haven't talked frankly to him. But we're close in a way. I feel sad about things like that. I haven't talked actively, straightforwardly to my son about it yet. He's 13. But we're very, very close and I just ... I can't imagine him not understanding or not ... I think he'll be surprised if it was anything else

Douglas finds it difficult to communicate about his sexuality because he doesn't have a box. In the next chapter I describe the benefits he feels from his nomadism, but here he expresses envy of those whose sexualities appear to be simple.

I conclude this section on compulsory sexual orientation with three brief examples of the power of discourse on the everyday production of sexual orientation. We might loosely refer to these respectively as: 1) corporate media representation of sex, 2) scientific models of sexual desire, and 3) 'commonsense' notions of sexual orientation. Of course, these three discourses are not discrete, but interact and intersect in various combinations. Most of the participants expressed frustrations with mainstream pornography. Erica's critique focused on how sexually categorical and gender normative it tends to be.

Jamie: Are they like any combinations of people that you'd like to watch or are there particularly sexy images? Like straight, lesbian or gay or mixed or other things?

Erica: Mixed stuff I think would be good. In a way, I think, it's part of the problem that I have with erotic images and stuff, that it is straight or it's gay or it's lesbian and its rarely [a] mixed thing with no description made, no boxes, no identification [...] and no shiny chests or shaved cunts and things. That pisses me off and [...] I'm too busy getting politically pissed off at stuff to actually get horny about it.

Alasdair's description of his sexual identity seems to draw on scientific models of sexual orientation advocated by Kinsey in the 1950s.

Jamie: And how long have you felt yourself as bisexual?

Alasdair: Well, I've been aware that there is a spectrum of sexuality, I suppose, for a very long time and I guess I've placed myself somewhere along that spectrum as long as I've been aware that there is such a thing.



Originally I suspected that I was just gay. People tend to put a label on themselves. But for a long time I had assumed that I'm somewhere around the ... somewhere along that spectrum, not at 100% gay.

When I first asked him about his sexual orientation, he described it in numerical terms: 'about 60% gay, but it's varied throughout my life.' Phyllis described early anxieties about sexual identity which draws on more commonsense discourses of sexual desire.

Jamie: And then, so before you identified as queer, did you have a label before that or just kind of ...

Phyllis: I don't think I had a conscious label. I knew that I fancied women. I was really clear about that from when I was at school. I was really clear about that but I had been scared to do anything about it and then I had a couple of boyfriends and it was like 'this is not really ... I'm not really enjoying this. There's something wrong here.' And then ... I remember talking about this with my husband and saying 'what am I going to do? What if I sleep with a woman and it's bad as well? What am I going to do then?' So I was kind of scared to actually get into anything. But then I did and it was brilliant, really, really brilliant. So by then I didn't mind.

Here, Phyllis's anxieties stem from the assumptions promoted by compulsory sexual orientation. There are only two types of sex, heterosexual and homosexual, and everyone should like at least one of those. If she had had bad sex with a woman, she feared it would have meant that there was something wrong with her, rather than recognising that the limitations of any particular sexual experience are not necessarily based on the gender category of one's partner.

### Compulsory Monogamy

The institutionalisation of monogamy has long come under criticism for the compulsory regulation it entails. Long before monogamy was questioned by other feminists, 19th-century anarchist feminists in the US and UK challenged the role of the State apparatus, capitalism and patriarchy in forcing marriage on women (see e.g., Greenway, 2003; Haaland, 1993; Presley, 1999). More recently, compulsory monogamy has been tied into contemporary consumer capitalism and notions of ownership (McPheeters, 1999), patriarchal religion (Stelboum, 1999), race and class (Willey, 2003), and gender and compulsory sexual orientation (Rosa, 1994). The relationship between compulsory monogamy and so many

forms of hierarchy makes it an important point of analysis. More specifically, the incomprehensibility of alternatives to heterosexuality and homosexuality stem from the monogamous ideal of one person being able to fulfill all of one's needs (see e.g., Queen, 1995). This can also be illustrated through my discussion with Pete on how he thought he would feel if he found himself attracted to a man.

That would be very difficult, yeah, because [...] I always was very naïve, in a way, or I always had these big dreams of [...] finding the big love [...]. I would ... this would break ... because now, I think, I've found it. This would break then I would be really quite destroyed.

Bisexuality has long been criticised based on assumptions of its incompatibility with monogamy, and the assumption that monogamy is an intrinsically superior characteristic of relationships (Murray, 1995; Norrgard, 1991; Rust, 1993) -- representation rears its ugly head again. Because the participants in this research project are in mixed relationships, similar assumptions have been made about their incapacity for monogamy. One academic discussing my research in the planning stage asked me, 'do you mean promiscuous couples?' Monogamy obviously had to be addressed. I asked participants about their relationship status in terms of monogamy, how that decision was made, and how they continue to communicate about it. Eight of the participants were in relationships they defined as monogamous, five were in non-monogamous relationships with one other person, and three had polyamorous relationships (i.e. maintaining multiple ongoing romantic and/or sexual relationships).

Little, if any, research has looked at the everyday production/policing of monogamy. Nor was it a key aim of this research project, though some examples did come up in the interviews. Kev spoke the most extensively about his experiences of compulsory monogamy.

Jamie: Can you think of any examples where you felt embarrassed, guilty or ashamed about something to do with sex?

Kev: Yeah. It depends who you're with. If I'm with my colleagues from work and something ... even if we were talking about general sex and someone says something like 'oh, well, no one does that' and I do do that, then that's kind of embarrassing. But, yeah, if you're with queer friends then it's different usually because in some ways they're much more forgiving. I think that the idea of monogamy as well is something that's come up I know with colleagues at work and one colleague in particular [...] he'll make a joke about me having sex with somebody who isn't my partner and they go 'ha, ha' unless you and your partner ... 'ha, ha.' And it's

kind of ... yeah, it's almost like a ... I don't know whether it's actual probing, is this the case or not or whether it really is just a ... because obviously you wouldn't because you're a nice person but that's ... it's not embarrassing itself. It's kind of awkward and I think if I were to say 'well, actually, we do do that' then I'd be embarrassed because the expectation is like 'you wouldn't do that'. So, yeah, sometimes.

Jamie: Is that the main kind of thing that comes to mind [...]?

Kev: Probably. I think the monogamy thing's the biggest thing just because it seems like a moral judgement, that anything to do with that, even ... no matter what it is, it's a kind of implied that if you do that, you're not really committed to your partner or it'll never last or ... and it's like it's such a big expectation. There's not a lot of things that would be embarrassing like getting caught having a wank with someone else in a public place wouldn't be really embarrassing if it came out but it wouldn't be *as* embarrassing, in a way, because it's just kind of a small thing. It's not this ... it's like 'oh, that's inappropriate behaviour' as opposed to 'oh, my God! You've done something that God's going to smite you for', which is kind of the impression you get sometimes. [...] But it's a big thing. It's a big package. It all goes together as opposed to a single act. It's sort of like if you do this one thing then all these other things must be true. It's even worse than identity in a way. It's a non-monogamy identity that's imposed on you and therefore your entire personality changes.

Kev's fears of acknowledging that his relationship is non-monogamous have been further supported by experiences of scandalised friends.

Even again with friends, the two of us have been out with friends before and I've been sort of distracted looking at someone going past and my friends have been scandalised at me doing this and then my partner looks over and says 'who are you looking at? Oh, yeah, I like him.' And they've been even more scandalised then.

There are couple of things going on here in this part of my interview with Kev. First of all, sexual policing is contextual. Compulsory monogamy as state-form seems to be alive and well in the culture of Kev's workplace. Among his 'queer' friends, however sexuality is allowed to be more nomadic -- 'they're much more forgiving'. Second, and more importantly, compulsory monogamy is 'the biggest thing' in terms of Kev's experience of sexual policing. Much as Foucault (1990) argued that the homosexual had been produced as a new type of being, Kev

finds the experience of being judged as non-monogamous as encompassing the entirety of his identity.

Like many other aspects of producing sexual state-forms, emotions, particularly jealousy, play a role in the existence of compulsory monogamy. Relationship therapist Marny Hall (1999) has argued that jealousy depends upon other feelings including fear of loss, poor self-esteem and a sense of powerlessness. Thus, jealousy does not indicate the strength of one's love for another, as some seem to believe, but is tied up with emotions, including pathological shame, that inevitably result from institutionalised competitions and hierarchies. My analysis supports Hall's.

Sandra spoke of jealousy at a few points during the interview. The first quote refers to her partner and the second is on the topic of feeling envious of other people.

he mentioned to me that there was a woman that we both knew that he found really attractive and she was like this petite little thing, that was like the stereotype of what men *do* find attractive and I just thought 'Oh' grumble, grumble, grumble because I suppose I'm insecure in some ways. I don't really want my partner to find anybody else attractive and I don't want anybody else to find *my* partner attractive.

Envious, I don't know, of people and their relationships. Like 'oh, I wish I could be as close as you guys are' or 'I wish you would tell me your secrets' and 'I know you tell that other person your secrets and it would be kind of nice if you felt close enough to me to ...'. I can't think of anybody or any situation in particular really but I know that I have had thoughts like that at times.

Like other participants, Sandra's discussions of jealousy or envy refer to feelings of insecurity and loss. Jealousy can also have a negative impact on open communication within relationships. Eva talked about difficulties talking with her partner about attractions to other people.

I, for one, don't want him to feel threatened or whatever because sometimes we would ... we could be talking to each other about stuff like that and it would be in more of a sexual setting already and we'd be quite turned on and it would be cool. But other times I would be worried that it would freak him out and it might be something nice to talk about in a fantasy kind of way but then I worry that he's worried that I actually really want to run off with so-and-so. And I think that's a legitimate worry because it does seem that he thinks that way, which is kind of crap because it's fine to talk about this tonight but in the morning he's going to have a wee drama about it.

Eva described herself as generally being much more comfortable with sexuality than her partner. Meanwhile, Kev talked about being in the position of feeling less comfortable with sexuality than his partner.

Kev: I still find it quite difficult about being open about some things and there's still ... I think there's some pressure when you have a partner who's sort of much more sexually open than you are, to be as sexually open sometimes but not hugely.

Jamie: So it's kind of like you're pressured?

Kev: It feels like you're ... you feel pressure in a way but obviously you're internalising the pressure. It seems almost like an envy thing almost, that you ... in some ways you'd like to be at the same stage your partner's at, in some ways. And in other ways, you don't want to be that but it's more sort of pressuring yourself than your partner pressuring you, I think. [...] you [also] know that a lot of the negative aspects are pressure from like society, other people around you and so you resent that too so a lot of it's trying to say 'oh, to hell with them', but then you try to work out, what do I really want to do with this. Now am I doing this just to rebel and ... it's a whole range of things.

As Kev's quote, along with the literature on microsociology and emotions (e.g., Scheff, 1990), suggests it is not possible to separate self-policing from 'external' policing. While understanding the impact of jealousy on sexual communication and compulsory monogamy would require more focused research, like fear and shame discussed earlier, jealousy clearly has policing effects. I return to this issue in the next chapter, when I discuss resistance to compulsory monogamy.

### Continuous Colonisation

Compulsory sexual orientation cannot be entirely reduced to the effects of heteronormativity, homonormativity and compulsory monogamy – the state-form's need for overcoding is insatiable. Practices, identities and desires excluded from these sexual state-forms -- bisexuality, polyamory, 'queerness', etc -- are not inherently nomadic. They may also be captured and disciplined by the state-form – they are deterritorialised spaces ripe for colonisation.

In a largely competitive and hierarchical world, it is all too easy to succumb to the temptation of the reverse discourse, to transform feelings of stigma into feelings of superiority. In fact, this is sometimes even advised.

Fears about polyamory can be internalised in ways similar to homophobia. It is easy to internalise the social approbation for having multiple relationships which include sex. There can be an inescapable suspicion that there is something wrong with oneself. If other people are able to be successfully and blissfully monogamous with a single partner forever and ever, then there must be something wrong with me if I can't do it. On the other hand, one can also begin to see oneself as more highly evolved and special for wanting and being able to do this really wonderful thing -- love more than one (Halpern, 1999: 159).

While such strategies might have some mental health benefits for the individual, they will also have other effects. Representing the desire or capacity to have sex with more than one person, more than one gender, or any other 'transgressive' gender/sexuality as superior to others contradicts the ethical principles of anarchism and poststructuralism. 'Equal opportunity lover,' a phrase sometimes used in the US for bisexuality, combines a disturbing bi supremacy with a liberal corporate discourse suggesting the possibility of hierarchical, yet fair, workplaces. And, as I argued in Chapter Three, queer, in many contexts, has become an identity label with borders.

In the next chapter, I talk about how some people find queer to be an open and liberating concept. But first, several of the participants offered their understandings of queer as a limited category.

Anita: Whereas being queer, that sort of came more in the mid 90's. God, I feel like I'm so old. And that's sort of more polysexual to me in a lot of ways and it tends to be quite a young-identified thing as well. You're in your mid 20's. You're queer. You've got lots of gay boyfriends. You're maybe a bit punk, you know, that sort of stuff.

Meg: [T]here's two sets of kind of associations [...]. Probably like a political one and ... or a more politicised thing and it's a very metropolitan, contemporary sort of identity thing.

Sandra: Queer I find weird. Queer I suppose I associated more with guys. Queer's a weird ... queer is a queer term. Yeah, I would never use it for me. It doesn't seem as friendly. It seems like guys, like black people calling each other 'nigger' or guys calling each other 'queer'. It's not a term I would

use.

Participants in their forties and older were particularly uncomfortable with queer as a label, having grown up with it as a purely negative term.

Alasdair: Well it's a derogatory term generally in this country. Although a lot of gay people use it on themselves, traditionally it's a word used by people who are not sympathetic to gay people and therefore I tend to dislike it.

Douglas: Queer just, to me, sounds terribly old-fashioned and insulting, just about ... I think it's just utterly old-fashioned. It says more about the person using it ... queer ... you're queer. I just ... I can't relate to that.

The constant threat to nomadic identities is further demonstrated by participants sometimes feeling 'not LGBT enough'. While I have addressed this to an extent in the discussion of policing gay space, homonormativity is limited to the notion of a correct way to be gay or lesbian. Both Anne and Meg described feelings of not being bisexual enough. Anne's nomadic sexuality eludes the state-forms of heterosexuality and bisexuality, causing her some concern, including her legitimacy as a participant in my research.

Anne: I also don't see myself as straight, in that kind of really, really rigid kind of perceived kind of cultural notion of straight [...] because I have, like, you know, fancied women before and pursued women as well, so, dunno. I suppose I'm not happy with the categorisation. [But,] I don't want to be one of those lipstick lesbian, pseudo-lipstick lesbians that go around saying oh yeah, I'm bisexual, right, cos that's so cool, cos I'm, at the moment, I'm, do you know what I mean?

Jamie: So you, you'd worry, worry about cashing in on bisexual chic or something?

Anne: Yeah, exactly. Yeah.

Jamie: You don't feel like you've the right claim, huh?

Anne: No, because if, cos if me and [my partner] split up tomorrow, I can't, I just can't envisage myself looking at women sexually, but then give it another six months and I dunno it could change again. It's just about where, do you know what I mean, what you feel comfortable with at the time. Does that make sense? [...] So does that mean I'm a crappy interviewee now?

Meg has also had anxieties about her queer status. She mentioned being teased about not having had sex with any women recently.

One of my best gay boyfriends said to me 'what's your contribution to women's sexual pleasure been in the last three years? I've made more contribution ...' [...] Oh, that's gay friends. That's 100% gay friends taking the piss out of me for being largely heterosexual. I practiced being heterosexual over the last three years.

Meg emphasises that this is due to a disappointing lack of opportunity rather than desire.

Ha, ha, ha, yes, yes. It is true. I had more sex with men in the last three years. It's easier. There's more men ... there's more heterosexual men and more heterosexual men who offer sex, invite sex and who are in a game of flirtation with one, with me, than there are women *and* there's also a connection to the thing we were discussing earlier on, which is that in some ... more sexualised parts of the women scene I don't code as very interesting to people, I don't think, and generally in the dyke scene, I don't pull very well, I don't think, because [...] I don't do cute enough, fashionable tank tops and I've not kept up with that, and I think I don't look ... I possibly look too femmie. [...] if you look a bit femmie in some dyke bars, you're seen as not that lesbian or you're just bi-curious or ...

In her research on compulsory heterosexuality in the context of Ann Summers' parties, Merl Storr (2003) argued that teasing was a technique used by the women to keep each other in (heterosexual) line. Not only has Meg being teased about her own 'heterosexuality', but she is also self-conscious about the apparent heterosexuality of her relationship with a (formerly) gay man.

Meg: I don't work at it with him. I was a bit self-conscious that other people might think I had. I was very keen and got together to point out that I hadn't seduced him because he's seen as being gay and I'm seen as being the slag. So I was really like 'actually I didn't seduce him, actually'.

Jamie: Is that a kind of 'I wasn't the one who made him straight'?

Meg: Yeah.

Jamie: 'It wasn't me. It wasn't my fault.'

Meg: I'd joke about ... yeah. I'd joke about straightening him out and getting a grant from some bigot church to straighten out men. It's a bit of a long-term project. Yeah, there's ... some discomforts there, sort of at a



jokey level but also ...

Anne and Meg's experiences demonstrate the fragility of resisting the hetero/homo division for sexual nomadism. Their capacities to mobilise bisexual, queer or other sexual identities have met with policing, indicating a degree of rigidity to these categories.

Like gay and lesbian identities, bisexuality becomes reified through identity politics strategies. Sandra talked about her political reasons for using the label 'bisexual'.

I feel it's important to go to Gay Pride and be a regular person rather than a caricature, which is what I tend to see the drag queens as, kind of cartoon ... playing ... taking advantage of the circumstances so that they can play dress up, which ... I kind of don't want to take it away from them but at the same time, in terms of educating the public, like you can have feelings for men and have feelings for women. I think that if you're somebody who appears like anybody else, that it can only help because they know ... because I'm monogamous. I'm not a nymphomaniac. I'm kind of regular in a lot of ways and so I think I do latch on to the label for educational purposes, to help further the cause. [...] I want to fight against the stereotype [of] on the fence, undecided, sex-crazy, by carrying that label and not being those things. So I think that has sort of gelled in the past few years. That's probably also part of why I go. 'Hi, I'm bisexual' so that people can go 'oh, but you're not like snogging everybody in the room' or whatever their stereotype is.

Sandra clearly rejected an overtly authoritarian approach to policing to keep it 'normal'. But, referring to drag queens again, she said 'you don't get that chance too often and like go for it and have a lovely time but that's why I wouldn't say you can't do that but maybe I wish you wouldn't.' Likewise, she does not want to force, but encourage, people who are not 'out of control' to represent their stigmatised category by adopting the label.

Jamie: So you haven't got any problem with people who say 'I don't do labels', even though one could fit to them?

Sandra: Yeah, generally not because I think it's a matter of personal choice but I think if somebody does fit a label really well, especially if they would represent it really well and that could be a really good tool for other people, that *it's a shame that they don't accept the label*, if they fit it. It's the old ... it's the same as Gay Pride. Somebody who fits this label isn't necessarily really terrifying or really out of control or whatever and the more people who sort of fit labels and are good examples, I think it's kind of a shame sometimes that ... if they don't accept the label to be used as a tool. I can understand not wanting to do labels because we are not ... the

label is not all we are and I can see that people would rebel against that on that basis. I am not just that label or that label or the other label. I am much more than what you might think of when you see that label. So I can understand that and that's fine but I think labels can be used productively as well, constructively. [My emphasis.]

I am concerned that this approach has the unintended effects of promoting authoritarianism, which is necessary to maintain the borders of identity categories. Eva described her changing relationship with the politics of labels.

Politically, I think, one thing, now that I think about it that has changed is when I first came out as bi and was very out about it in a kind of uppity sort of way, I really disliked people calling themselves things like lesbians that sleep with men and stuff and a lot of people seeming to be just scared of the bi label and that really bothered me and I felt that they should reclaim it and get over it and we could do with a bit more support, but now I'm more tolerant of that, I think, because I think if that's the label that works best with you then go with it. And just seeing even more examples of how people can be a lot more fluid. Like I do have a friend who considers herself gay. She says gay. I would say lesbian, whatever. Whatever. And she's been with this guy for like two years but she considers herself gay except for him and that's fine [...] because not everybody's head works in the same way as mine and that's for the best really.

While I've argued that gay and lesbian identity politics is in danger of depoliticising heterosexuality, queer identity runs the risk of producing 'straight' as the dull cousin of queer (i.e. Non-heterosexual and/or non-transgressive). Beth and Eva talked about how their partners were uncomfortable with the label 'straight'.

Jamie: Has he got a label that he would use for himself?

Beth: No. He really doesn't like labels. He really resents it when I say 'straight' just meaning not anything else.

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Eva: We had problems this morning and it's a bit awkward, which isn't too much to do with my sexual orientation but I think it comes into it a bit because partly he's just kind of ... I don't know, he's kind of insecure and he thinks 'oh, I'm just a boring straight boy' and I'm like 'no, you're not'. [...] The [book] I'm reading at the minute is straight and queer women writing about sexuality and he kind of flicks through it but he kind of gets freaked out by the sort of stuff in them and just kind of noticed ... he seemed to find a lot of things in it, which would be things like ... 'he copes

rather well for a straight boy'. 'He was quite clued in for a straight boy'. So he's not thrilled. There's issues around that sort of thing. And because a lot of my friends are queer or transgendered or whatever, it's not very so-called normal, which he doesn't have an issue about. It doesn't freak him out and he doesn't have anything stupid to say on the matter but I think it makes him feel like he is boring, which is a shame.

## **Conclusion: The State-like Relationships of Sexual Orientation**

One of my initial questions in undertaking this research project is how to understand sexual orientation. Based on analysis of this chapter, one might suggest that it is an effect of State-like relationships. The State depends upon hierarchies of mind over body (Albert, 2004), masculine over feminine (Brown, 1995; Daly, 1988; Ferguson, 1984), and, consequently, rational over emotional (see also discussion in Chapter 3). This results in, and depends upon, relationships of violence and shame to maintain these hierarchies. That this violence originates from the dominant ideology is disguised through the onus placed on deviation rather than policing, even in instances of self-policing.

State or lawful violence always seems to presuppose itself, for it preexists its own use: the State can in this way say that violence is 'primal,' that it is simply a natural phenomenon responsibility for which does not lie with the State, which uses violence only against the violent, against 'criminals' -- against primitives, against nomads -- in order that peace may reign (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988:448).

Like the compulsory nature of the State, sexual orientation is itself compulsory and is intertwined with compulsory monogamy and gender. Like the State, the violence necessary to continuously produce these concepts is justified by the dominant ideology which assumes their necessity or even their essential nature. Efforts to escape this compulsory logic through the production of oppositional identities can result in reification of those identities and the continuation of policing. Politics aiming to eliminate the hetero/homo dichotomy must challenge the State-like relationships of which it is an effect. Similarly, an effective anarchist politics cannot simply challenge the State as institution, but must disrupt State-like relationships in all aspects of life. Sexuality is one such aspects ripe with policing. To emphasise the mutually supportive nature of relationships within the State apparatus and the State-like relationships of sexual orientation, I conclude with Alasdair's encounter with the State. Here, hierarchies of sexuality, class and authority are used to justify officials' and

villagers' efforts to shame Alasdair, violence justified by its use against against a criminal, a nomad.

Jamie: Can you think of any examples where you've felt embarrassed, guilty or ashamed about something to do with sex?

Alasdair: Yes. The outstanding example is my wife was nine months pregnant and I was in the local town, cottaging, and I was caught in a police trap and ... the embarrassment went on and on but for a start I was concerned because my wife would be worried, not knowing where I was and then, when it got out in the village, we lived in a small village, that caused her long period of considerable difficulty. It put my marriage under great strain. It didn't do either of us any good at all. It went on over a month. That's the outstanding example. I can't, offhand, think of any other instance that's anywhere near that one.

Jamie: Were you charged?

Alasdair: I was charged. I think I was admonished but it's ... I believe it's something I had to declare when I apply for a licence or something for certain things. It's a stain upon my character. But it was a very transitory thing and of course somebody in the village, who we knew very well, heard about it and ... 'how could you? With a taxi driver!' I didn't even know he was a taxi driver! I'd never exchanged one word with him. It was through the partition of a public toilet.

Jamie: Why do you think she picked out taxi driver?

Alasdair: Because she thought of me as a gent. She was a right old-fashioned lady and she felt that I wouldn't have sex with a taxi driver.

Jamie: So it wasn't because he was a man. It was because he was ... 'common' or something?

Alasdair: It seemed so, yes. That just made it worse, the fact that it was with a member of the lower orders. She herself was of the sort of class where she would call me 'Mr' although she knew me very well. Yes, that was quite interesting, her reaction. [...] Other people I've known ... I mean I've continued to have friends in the village and one guy that I still know, he never referred to it 'til one time we had a drink or two, he said 'despite what they say about you, I think you're a good chap'. That's the only reference he ever made to it. Most other people have never spoken to me about it. There was plenty of whispering in the village. And one of the effects was that people who sent their young children to my wife for piano lessons, ceased to do so. It made life very difficult for my wife. She was really hurt by that. But we survived it. [...] I don't think it came as any great shock to her but it was the social aspect of it that really [...] The Judge got great pleasure out of telling me off in front of the Press and everybody saying 'if you're going to do that, you don't do it here'. They

went on and on for about 10 minutes but [...] just admonished me. [...] The police were not very nice in that I told them my wife was heavily pregnant and I didn't want her unnecessarily worried and they left me in a cell for about three hours, cold cell, and they took my trousers to be analysed to see if they could find semen on them and so they had to go ... they had to send a police car to the house to get another pair of trousers for me. So that was the first my wife knew about it when the police car turned up.



## Chapter Seven

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### Resisting Orientation: Explorations in Sexual Nomadism

*I did not design this game  
I did not name the stakes  
I just happen to like apples  
and I am not afraid of snakes*

-- Ani Difranco, *Adam and Eve*

*The cycles of the sun, the moon, the seasons are  
all we've ever needed, same way we always had  
territories instead of 'owning' the land. Property's  
something you came up with. Raven says it's  
because you think in terms of boxes. Everything's  
got to fit in one - you even live in them.*

*Territory's a different thing. It's not permanent. We  
mark out what we need when we're mating, when  
we're feeding the kids, then let it go. Don't build  
anything permanent on it, don't leave much of a  
mark at all. Some raggedy nest, maybe, feathers,  
scat, nothing the rain and time won't wash away.  
And we never keep it just to ourselves, you know,  
saying that flower can't grow here, sparrow can't  
feed, the sun can't shine here, the wind can't  
blow, fox can't walk through, spider can't make its  
web. Makes no sense to us.*

-- Charles de Lint, *Some Place to Be Flying*

Sexual life, including identities, relationships, practices and desires, is often expected to fit within categories. Whether these categories are imagined to be 'natural' or socially constructed, they are also often imagined to be necessary. According to this imagining, categories provide the map by which people make sense of their experiences and desires, and even of their very selves. However, as I demonstrated in the previous chapter, the production of this map is far from democratic. Individuals and their sexual lives are contained, through shame and representation, within the borders of sexual state-forms by processes of categorisation that supposedly encompass all possibilities. Furthermore, all possibilities are

then judged in terms of those state-forms. Sexual orientation is the product of overlapping state-forms. More nuanced arguments advocating the benefits of sexual orientation categories also address their limitations, acknowledging some of the problems caused by categorisation. Much as the State is often argued to be a necessary evil, so sexual identities may be seen as the best possible strategy. Few people argue that a completely egalitarian society would not be ideal, but many question its practicality, finding it impossible to imagine. The end of sexual orientation is similarly difficult for many people to imagine. What does it mean to live without the State(-form)? In this chapter, I explore the ways in which the participants evade sexual state-forms, instead participating in the production of sexual nomadism. Not ruled by the borders of state-forms, the nomadism of these people's lives demonstrates the practice of resisting orientation. First, I examine the various ways in which people relate to sexual labels, and the tactics they develop for evading the constraints they so often entail. Second, I look at how participants manage to resist compulsory monogamy. And third, in a series of extended analyses, I document how the concepts of 'desire', 'gender' and 'sexual practice' are each potentially nomadic spaces in themselves. Furthermore, the relationship between them is not inherently tied to the formula of sexual orientation: do you desire sex with people of the same gender, the other gender or both?

## **Negotiating Labels**

Participants resisted orientation through an active negotiation of sexual orientation labels. If sexual orientation is the product of policing, of shame and violence, it is at the same time continuously produced (or not) through resistance. Participants' relationships with sexual orientation labels can be understood in three, sometimes overlapping, ways. First, as with Mark and Erica, some people (in some situations) reject sexual orientation labels entirely. Another tactic for negotiating a sexual terrain defined in terms of sexual orientation is to utilise labels as a form of resistance, particularly choosing labels which are either perceived to be more open and flexible or those which demonstrate a resistance to more normative categories. Finally, participants also used labels as a form of tactical communication in order to maintain boundaries.



## **No Logos: Rejecting Sexual Orientation Labels**

Two of the men I interviewed could easily identify as heterosexual, but resisted the emotional and political standards associated with that state-form. Laurence and Pete were both involved with women who identified as either bisexual or queer, while neither of the men identified as heterosexual or straight, despite historically only being sexually attracted to women. Both were wary of labelling themselves. When I asked Pete why he didn't label himself, he replied

Because I haven't actually thought about it enough. I don't know. Perhaps I'm afraid to put myself on one side and I don't like that, and you're in the middle. It's difficult to compromise. [You can] get along with everybody and you don't have to put [yourself] in one corner because mostly it's different groups and then [...] you don't say 'I'm part of that group'. It's much easier to communicate, I think. So it just makes life easier, I think.

Similarly, Laurence also took relativist approach, saying

I experience straight. Yeah, to a degree, I suppose but then, to an equal degree you'd probably say that I can be queer by extension to somebody who was more straight than me. It's all kind of relative ...

Both men also acknowledged the possibility of their desires changing in the future. Laurence in particular elaborated his philosophy on the validity of identity.

we have the capacity to be absolutely any sort of person at all in terms of it's all so relative to all sorts of circumstances. Just because I've never had an inclination or an attraction towards somebody of my own sex doesn't necessarily mean that I'm not homosexual. It might just mean that .. or bisexual or whatever, it just means that that sort of experience either hasn't happened, it might never happen for me but it doesn't essentially mean that I definitely am that way because it could change on its head and I could meet somebody tomorrow and make it absolutely ... kind of completely put my world upside-down. The idea of almost suppressing anything that ... my own will or my own heart, would throw up ... just for the sake of just pushing myself into a box would seem to be kind of cutting off my nose to spite my face somehow [...] There's never been that sort of crush when it's been like 'OK, these are the boats leaving. That's the heterosexual boat there and this is basically the homosexual boat there and never the twain can meet. There's never been a decisive moment where I've really sort of had to go 'yes, this is my sexuality and I'm going to stand by it.'

Pete also saw things in much more flexible and fluid terms than those promoted by a notion of 'sexual orientation'.

I think it's much [...] more a question with whom you can get in love than what your sexual preferences are. It's more like can you get in love with somebody of the same sex or with opposite sex or can you have both or just one? Yeah, that's the main issue. Many things can matter really. [...] I could actually fall in love with somebody of the same gender. On the other side, having a sexual relationship, I could imagine less than that. I think love is, for me, something more between ... something a deep understanding, a deep feeling, togetherness feeling, whereas, with sexual ... with sex there is more comes to that. There's just something also ... something more than that. But, of course, I think, after a while, when you're feeling ... you're right, when you really fall in love with somebody, I guess then you have to come together at the end. [...] On the other side, no, I'm not sure because you could really fall in love with somebody and just don't want to have sex with that person. I think that's totally possible. How to define that?

Pete asked a very important question which points out the limitations of representation. More importantly, asking it did not seem to cause him any emotional distress. This is evidence not only on intellectual questioning of sexual orientation categories, but of a profound resistance to a supposedly unquestionable truth about love, sex, gender and relationships. The resistance is profound because it evades the privatising logic of the state-form, that which encourages any who question the unquestionable to ask, 'what is wrong with me?'

This is a difficult question to ask oneself, and often results in defensive aggression. In terms of sexual orientation, this can be understood as a significant basis of anti-gay prejudice (e.g., Butler, 1993; Herek, 2004). Laurence shared a story of neatly derailing the experiences of shame and anxiety that all too often attend the questioning of one's 'sexual orientation'.

Laurence: I'd met somebody at [work] who's bisexual and when I met him and found out that he was, that in itself made me think 'ah, OK,' and the potential for what would it be like being with him, not in terms of a fantasy as such but just in terms of ... yeah, no more than that really, a 'what if?' sort of scenario.

Jamie: So kind of a non-sexual fantasy, like playing it through in your head, what would that be like?

Laurence: No, not even that far. Just more from the fact, would there be a potential for me to kind of be with that person? That, in itself, it's almost kind of assumed a prerequisite in myself that that might be an option and

so from that point of view, I think that potential was already there. [...] It was interesting because the guy who was bisexual, at [work], wasn't someone who I would be attracted to at all really and isn't but ... certainly the idea of him ... and me finding out that he was bisexual kind of made me think, from my own point of view, of could I be, in terms of it raised it as a question in my mind in terms of I certainly didn't dismiss it. I didn't sort of actually encourage it because he wasn't really somebody who I could sort of ever really picture myself with. There wasn't really any attraction in that sort of way but if there had been then ... I don't know but certainly the idea didn't bother me at all. [...] It wasn't like a big 'oh, I'm a bisexual' because it wasn't even that kind of ... it didn't even come as that much of a revelation. The idea of being with him was really kind of more finding out that he was bisexual from that point of view. Ah, right, so he's potentially interested in other guys. I wonder who he's interested in. In the same way as if I'd met a girl who I'd kind of liked then I can imagine asking myself the same question but he hadn't specifically ... there wasn't the inclination from it being somebody who I was attracted to but [...] I would normally only question that sort of thing if it was somebody that I was. [...] And it certainly wasn't something that I dwelled on for a long time or thought about for a long time. [...] There was never any substance to [our relationship]. But interesting. But certainly [...] that was the [only] time that I think my thoughts swayed towards any idea of having a relationship with another guy basically.

Of course while this questioning was very abstract, it seems very similar to the sort of processes that would trigger a very uncomfortable emotional reaction in many people that had a strong investment in a stable heterosexual identity. Laurence, on the other hand, rejects such a notion of sexuality. His resistance to orientation incorporates an anti-representationalist ethic, made clear in his comments on 'coming out'.

it shouldn't be as big a deal as it is, in terms of it shouldn't be ... there shouldn't be the fear and stigma that there seems to be, by the term 'coming out the closet' seems in some way shocking and it seems in some way coming out of hiding basically. I think people should always really have the freedom to go on their own journeys, their own voyages in terms of ... or working out themselves on what makes themselves tick. That, in itself, that journey is tricky enough without having to deal with other people's perceptions of it and having to worry about other people's attitudes to these things is really ... that's not to say that we should just be ... just let everyone do what they want and not care about anyone else [...] But it shouldn't be as big a deal as I think society thinks it is.

When I talked in terms of a common understanding of 'coming out', he became upset at this way of thinking.

Jamie: I suppose ... if people who have same sex desires talk about their sexuality, they're coming out. If people who ...

Laurence: No, not necessarily. They're talking about their desires. That's not coming out as anything. It's just talking about their desires. If, by ... if the people around them want to describe it as such ... if the people around them have been under the impression that they've been heterosexual, then it would potentially be a coming out scenario but ... sorry, I think I've got away from this.[...] It's just basically, supposedly going against the experiences that are the mindset of what [someone's] had up to that point but it's just a different one from the other experience and ... that could be totally do with the one person that they've met and been attracted to, that they could have much more of a connection with and that could transcend the gender [...] It just so happens that they happen to be a different gender than the people they've had relationships with in the past. It shouldn't really be a case of coming out. [...] the longer those terms keep getting perpetuated, the longer we keep getting ourselves bogged down in all this sort of stuff that doesn't really matter because it's like ... at the end of the day, the person will still have their desires that they'll have, however we want to categorise it. It's how they understand it really and how they process it in such a way to be happy and to be able to enjoy it and be enthusiastic about it and hopefully not ... hurt other people around them, but it's always a juggling act. It's a bit of a juggling act with these sort of different elements in your life and it's so personal for every different people, to try and define people in that sort of way. I do think it's really wrong and just the wrong way of looking at things.

Here, Laurence offers a nomadic alternative to the standard representationalist politics of 'coming out'. He seems to advocate a more autonomous approach, acknowledging people's capacities to live with and explore their own desires without being told what they are or what they should be.

Several other participants also rejected sexual orientation labels, at least some of the time. Melissa has never particularly used a sexual orientation label. I asked her how this happened, and she replied,

Melissa: Well [...] it wasn't a very conscious decision. I just figured out that I found women also very attractive and at the same time I explored relationships with men and sado-masochism and stuff so [...] but mainly throughout my whole life I've been mainly dating with guys so then ... so I couldn't call myself a lesbian but I'm not straight heterosexual either.

Jamie: Are there other labels that you've ever used or you sometimes use?

Melissa: No. Very rarely do you have to define yourself. [...] I don't think I ever saw my sexual orientation in a kind of public manner or I never thought of it in a very negative light. I've only thought of myself as myself and I never kind of though ... and I've never really identified myself in that because I haven't thought of it. [...] I haven't really ever defined myself into a group or my sexual orientation into some other group or resembled myself to anybody else. its just my sexual orientation has been very much something between me and my partners.

For Melissa, the popular tactic of making the stigmatised 'personal' problem political was never appropriate, because she did not feel stigmatised. She never felt the need to become part of a sexual minority group.

Finally, Douglas feels that he has never been able to relate to any sexual orientation boxes. I asked him about how he related to various labels.

Douglas: Gay is ... gay isn't anything on either. It's a shortcut. [It] tends to imply an element of commitment and certainly enjoyment and immersion in not just a gay relationship but the whole gay experience and scene and politics. So that's ... that feels a bit overwhelming. It's quite a lot to say.

Jamie: Straight?

Douglas: Straight is equally insulting as queer. Straight is old-fashioned as well. It's old-fashioned in a way that I find appealing as well. You still like to think that these ... that it's a possibility. [...] It's not valuable.

Jamie: Have you ever used a label or a kind of box or ever ...?

Douglas: For myself?

Jamie: Yeah, and is it kind of like you were in one and you fell out or you've just never really been in one, do you think?

Douglas: I think I've been in an *asexual* box for a long time. Scared, denying sexuality completely. I suppose I would like to think an idealised image of myself would be a sort of ... ambisexual or it is ... or sex is this active choice and complication is accepted and variety is accepted. So monosexual box ... I quite like the monosexual relationship with myself sometimes. I mean it's just nice to be just you and your body and your fantasies. That's comforting. It's had to be comforting for a long time. Complicated, I think, is probably what I end up saying.

Jamie: Yeah. It's a long story.

Douglas: It's a long story. [LAUGHS]

Jamie: And it's not over yet.

Douglas: It's not over yet. [... LAUGHS] take the weekend off. Cancel your plans.

In this interview, I introduced the notion of sexuality being 'a long story'. Douglas's joking suggestion did not seem to imply the telling of a single long story, but an acknowledgment that he would need a lot of time to tell me many stories. Indeed, all the participants did tell me many stories about their relationships and desires. Perhaps this goes some way to explaining the trouble people have with sexual orientation labels. If one's 'sexuality' cannot be explained in a single story, no matter how long, 'it' certainly cannot be represented with a single label. Of course, in particular contexts singular stories, like coming out stories, are used to represent sexuality as the truth of the self (Plummer, 1995). Real life is always much more complicated than any singular story. Through the course of this research I have come to think of 'sexuality' as a realm of potential topics (or aspects) of many stories.

### Being Tactical: Labels as Boundaries, not Borders

Of course, we can and should reserve the freedom to choose what stories we tell (or don't tell) to particular people at particular times in particular situations. It is this tactical approach to story telling that characterises the second category of relationship between labels and resistance. Participants described various ways in which the tactical use of labels enabled telling stories -- enabled relating to people -- in ways that felt appropriate.

Although Erica has a very strong resistance to identity categories, as we saw in Chapter Five, she finds in certain situations a tactical value in using a label.

I can't remember the last time I'd really define myself as anything. I mean sometimes ... you see sometimes it'll be somebody and they'll just go 'oh, what, are you bi, then?' And I'll just go 'yeah' because I can't be bothered to have a conversation and it's OK. For what they need to know about me at that particular time and the idea that I ... the little question that I can see on their face, it's OK, that's their answer. That's what they need to know. They just want to know what I'm into and if I don't mind that and it's somebody I know ... I remember somebody, at some stage, somebody ... a guy who I knew and we were sitting in a squat somewhere and we were chatting about anarchism and stuff that I'd got involved in, because

we were all catching up on what we were doing, and so he asked me if I was bi because he'd never really thought about it or he'd assumed I was straight or whatever, or assumed I was a lesbian or whatever. So, yeah, if you checked, that was OK. So it's more like occasionally that sort of thing happened but *I don't see that as identifying. It's more like an easy conversation.* (My emphasis.)

Meg, on the other hand, is more comfortable using labels more generally, particularly in situations where the meaning of those labels is shared.

I would now describe myself as bisexual. I sometimes want to say queer bisexual. I sometimes want to say pansexual and queer and whatever else but the significance of it all for me is that it's changed historically ... and that all my friends know that.

Anita, however, recognises that in many contexts the meaning of various labels is not shared. She uses different labels with different people, telling different stories.

Poly/dyke/switch is what I seem to identify as. To myself that's my full label, poly ... dyke ... switch, yeah. So that's non-monogamy. I'm a dyke. I don't do men and I'm into SM. I don't use that full label for everybody. My parents are still coming to grips with the whole lesbian part of it. They can't deal with dyke either so it's lesbian for them. My sister and my workmates are still coming to grips with the whole poly thing. And the SM bit, I tend to be a bit more cautious about with them, with straight people. All my dyke friends know that I'm into SM.

Finally, Phyllis spoke about the tension between being open with intimate others and acknowledging the benefits of making tactical decisions depending upon the particularities of a given relationship.

I get to that stage in a friendship where it gets to the point you just have to say something to somebody because they can't go on assuming things in that way but it tends to be somebody who's very straight will assume that I'm straight even though nothing is going on anywhere at all and then you just have to say 'look, I'm not actually straight', and they go 'oh'. But I've not had really bad reactions from anyone. I mean I hang around it in a kind of liberal group anyway so I'm unlikely to get bad reactions from people I hang out with. Difficult? There's one guy that I slept with a few times who has no idea because he's ... well he's Afro-Caribbean and I've got a good idea where the conversation would go and I just don't want to do it. [...] Yeah, I mean he's quite homophobic and so you feel kind of ... in a way I feel disloyal to friends. Obviously I've got a lot of close friends who are gay and you feel 'well, it's all right for me. I can do this and it's easy. I don't have to say anything to him'. But there's another guy I slept with for

a while and I told him and it actually made it a lot better for him, I think. He started to wake up and stop making jokes about 'going to the loos and keeping his back to the wall' and shit like that. I'd go 'what did you say that for?' So yeah, I suppose the line between judging what you think ... what might happen with that conversation, whether it might be constructive or whether you're just going to hit a stone wall when you just don't even want to go there.

For the most part, Phyllis was very confident about the importance of judging particular situations. At the same time, her feelings of disloyalty to gay friends for having the options they may not can be read in a number of ways. On one hand, it can be seen as her feeling guilty for claiming heterosexual privilege by 'passing'. This reading is supported by Phyllis later saying that she feels very uncomfortable with any public displays of affection with male partners when she knows that same-sex couples cannot do the same thing so easily. On the other hand, it can also be read as a difficulty with the tension between a tactical approach and the more strategic 'we should be out and proud' approach of advocated by many forms of identity politics. I do not advocate one reading over the other, but suggest that, combined, they demonstrate the tensions produced by sexual state-forms and the necessity of tactical resistance.

### Making space: labels as nomadic resistance

Many of the participants also valued the use of labels as a tactic of resistance. Although some supported organisations that advocate what I have called strategic identity politics, none considered reclaim labels or LGBT Pride to be the centre of their sexual politics. Sandra, for example, said

Labels are tricky. I cling to them and reject them at the same time.

Similarly, Beth said

I do like labels a wee bit but I [...] think they can get in the way slightly. I found it really difficult to come out as bisexual when I'd only ever had relationships with blokes because it was like, well, you know, how can you know? [...] You couldn't be just something different from normal. You had to ... I felt as if, when I came out, you had to know what you were and that was a bit bad but it was quite nice once I had come out because it's like 'well, now you *do* know what you are.' [...] I think labels are a kind of first stage. It's like ... I think that society has to name things to be able to



come to terms with them but I think ... what I've seen in myself and my friends, has been that you sort of ... you take a label quite strongly and then you kind of lose interest and I'd hope that that happens in general, that people kind of look at sexuality and it's like ... they hear ... they never used to hear 'lesbian' or 'gay' or 'bisexual' or whatever. Now, they hear it and they know it's there and then eventually, hopefully they'll just get used to it and the labels will go away again and people just won't bother.

Although recognising the limitations of labels, many of the participants found them useful tools in resisting compulsory sexual orientation. At times, this included the use of labels that felt spacious and flexible -- allowing for nomadism in a way in which rigid state-form categories do not.

Three women in relationships with men talked about their difficulties in maintaining their own sexual identities despite their 'apparent' heterosexuality. Sandra felt that perhaps she relied on labels a bit too much, but was not sure what else to do.

Sandra: I don't want to deny my relationship but at the same time I don't want people to assume that I'm straight because I'm with a man and I find myself clarifying that with people inappropriately as a result. That's like 'Hi, I'm Sandra. I'm bisexual.' But especially if we go out and have a drink, even if it's the first time I meet you, the chances are it might happen just because I hate the assumption that I'm straight. I mean if you're straight, that's fine, but if you're not then you're not.

Jamie: So you find yourself like throwing it into conversation any way you can?

Sandra: Yeah, which I think is unfortunate. I don't think it's the healthiest way to go about it or even necessary but I hate the assumptions more than I hate being inappropriate.

Phyllis described similar difficulties, also being in a monogamous relationship with a man. Unlike Sandra, she was uncomfortable using the label bi. Queer was more valuable to her.

Phyllis: So really, when it comes down to it, I actually prefer to say 'queer'.

Jamie: And what is 'queer' to you?

Phyllis: 'Queer' can mean anything that isn't completely straight heterosexual, absolutely anything and I prefer a kind of much broader thing because partly I think it changes and partly I hate labels.

Jamie: How accurate do you feel the label 'bi' is?

Phyllis: Pretty difficult. I think it's very difficult because if you're into monogamy at all, you spend your whole time wondering whether you're really bi because whoever you're with at the time, you wonder whether you're still interested in the other. I'm not into ... although I have done, I have briefly had a ... two relationships going at the same time, which I felt bad about because one of them didn't know. Yeah, now I'm with this guy, this is really getting to me because I think I want to be with him for a long time so I feel I'm getting sucked into this kind of very straight world and I'm resisting it but I'm trying to work out in what ways I can resist it and still get on and not ... kind of resist it by not thinking I have to be sleeping with a woman in order to maintain my sexual identity. [...] But I know that I'm not straight and I can be sitting round with couple couples and I just think 'ahh, I just can't bear this' because there's no kind of ... I don't know. There isn't a shared understanding somehow of what's going on.

Jamie: So does it feel like a cultural difference or something?

Phyllis: It is really. It is, yeah, it is quite weird.

Jamie: And do you find people assuming that you're a heterosexual?

Phyllis: Obviously. Yeah, and I find that really, really difficult. I really don't like that and so I'm getting this thing like what am I going to say to people? And I know with his family, he's not going to say anything to them and so one night am I going to say 'well, I'm bi' and what's the point of saying that? Because if I'm not going to be sleeping with a woman, obviously that's not the whole of it but then what is it, when it's not that? So that's really what I'm interested in.

Although Meg was not in a monogamous relationship, she was pregnant at the time of interview. This raised issues like those described by Sandra and Phyllis.

Meg: What's useful about terms is to get a bit of critical distance from default heterosexuality and all the expectations of that, to use them as a way of challenge, yeah, inevitability, the kind of straightness of ... being pregnant. I mean it's all very heterosexualising and mostly that's fine but [...] What's important to me ... about bisexual is that I then ... it's partly that I have had and that I could have in the future, what we will have in the future, relationships with women as well as with men but ... I suppose it also keeps alive the fact that ... unlike my mother who, at my age, in the marriage, didn't expect to ever snog anyone else ever again. I don't have that expectation and I don't want to and neither does [my partner] and neither do we with each other and I suppose sexual practice ... yeah, it allows me to separate sexual practice with sexual identity as well. So we both like to keep that space. So what we do and who we do it with is separate to our commitment, whichever, so monogamy ... commitment

doesn't mean monogamy. We're quite committed but not monogamous.  
And we're very loving.

For all three of these women, resisting the representation of their lives as 'heterosexual' was very important to them. The forms of resistance advocated by strategic identity politics -- especially visibility -- were not so readily available to these women because of their partnerships with men. Sandra and Phyllis those described the awkwardness of attempting to use this strategy of visibility. For Sandra it felt socially awkward, but emotionally necessary. For Phyllis, the entire situation was an emotional dilemma. She felt 'different', but was unsure about the legitimacy of that 'difference' and also how to share those feelings with others. Meg, on the other hand, seemed most comfortable utilising a tactic of visibility through labels. Perhaps this is because her intention to have sexual relationships with women in the future is compatible with representations of queer or bisexual identity in a way in which monogamous male-female relationships are not.

Resisting compulsory heterosexuality is crucial to the resistance of compulsory sexual orientation in general. Escaping capture by the hetero-homo division is also necessary. Meg and Eva talked about how concepts and labels help them in this struggle. First, Meg talked about the importance of queer theory and politics.

It's stopped me feeling like a failed lesbian.

Similarly, Erica had a strong attachment to the word queer, without using it as an identity.

I can use queer but [...] I don't actually go to anybody and say oh, I'm coming out to you as this thing. Like I don't actually ever say I'm an anarchist, unless somebody really *asks* me and then I decide what level of conversation I have to have about that. But that's very rarely. It's like I don't feel like I need it. Queer is more like ... yeah, it's a word I like for lots of reasons and it's nice and, to me, I just sort of came across it in the phrase 'queers of all sexualities', which is the thing that pulled me in [to the queer anarchist group] in the first place [...] and it reminds me of my mates and it's a fun word [...]. But you know, it's more like that ... it's not like something that I attach to myself and I wear and that sort of thing.

Finally, Eva described her tactical use of the label bi.

It's a kind of visibility thing, really, because usually I'll say I'm bi if people are either expecting me to be straight or talking in terms of the lesbian and

gay community or something like that. So it's always for visibility that I have to jump in with that word.

For some of the participants, these labels were experienced as less binary, more spacious. Labels such as queer, bi, pansexual and dykey have for some people a greater degree of nomadic freedom than labels which have grown to solidify into rigid state-forms: gay and lesbian, heterosexual and homosexual. Metaphors of space and motion were used frequently by the participants. Meg described bisexual as 'roomy', while 'dykey, used as an adjective, could get a bit looser, a little bit broader so I could be a dykey woman even when I'm sitting with a man.' For her, queer is also useful for 'stretching the limits of what sex is or what sexual practice is and what dynamics you might have in it'. Eva said queer 'encompasses a lot of different possibilities.' Sandra likes being thought of as dykey because it helps her with 'getting away from the assumptions and the straight labels'. Diane liked the inclusivity of queer -- 'You can be straight and queer rather than having to be gay -- and that 'it's a bit unknown really as well. You can't make assumptions about queer because there are so many possibilities within it in that sense.' Phyllis described queer as a 'non-label, but in a way it's so broad. It doesn't make you one thing at one time and another thing at another time, so it allows you fluidity and it puts you in a space, which is big but it's also clear what it's not'. What is it not? For Phyllis it is not 'completely straight heterosexual'.

But what does that mean? What does queer include? Who can be dykey? How do you keep up your bisexual membership card? Although many of the participants found these labels much more flexible and spacious than others, they can still produce borders. Kev said that bi

seems to be much more of a flexible or open [identity...], although there are still stereotypes, it's still the kind of idea that if you're bi, you can't be satisfied with just one person. You have to be having sex with as many people as possible of both sexes at the same time or something.

Likewise, Phyllis said she was conscious about who she used the word queer with.

I find it's much more understood by other queer people. Whereas, if you say to a straight 'oh, I'm queer', they might ... 'well, what do you do? You're into S&M or something.' They immediately think there's something very completely odd about your sexuality or odd for them rather than just thinking 'oh, you're a different person' on the spectrum of people having relationships and doing stuff and they think you must be into some very

specific thing. Whereas, if I said I'm queer to you, you'd probably think 'oh, well, she's not straight'. So it's completely different.

Phyllis puts her finger on a key point, here. Like any word, queer is open to interpretation. Given the diverse and the often passionate interpretations of sexual labels, perhaps the tactical approach described by many of the participants in how they choose to use labels in discussions with others is also useful for identification itself. Viewing one's 'sexuality' as a series of stories rather than an essential truth of the self allows a greater flexibility in engaging with others. Overall, this appears to be the dominant approach taken by participants rather than more the strategic positions that characterise identity politics and sexual citizenship. In the simplest terms, this approach can include considering sexual labels to be adjectives rather than nouns, as descriptions rather than truths or even rather than 'necessary fictions'.

## **Resisting Compulsory Monogamy**

As I argued in Chapter Three, anarchism can be understood as the production of conditions that support and nurture the development of human potential for good relationships with themselves, each other and our living planet. For some people, at sometimes, in some relationships, these conditions may include monogamy. Saying that, if we accept the antirepresentationalist ethic of anarchism, then we must resist compulsory monogamy. Likewise, we must also reject the ways in which ideas of 'sexual liberation' have been used to coerce individuals into participating in sexual practices. Normative polyamory is no more solution to compulsory monogamy than normative lesbianism is to compulsory heterosexuality. Both involve relationships of domination. Neither nonmonogamy nor polyamory is more inherently anarchist or nomadic than monogamy.

Indeed, all of the participants demonstrated the possibility of nomadic exclusivities based on respect of each other's boundaries rather than on a border between good monogamy and bad non-monogamy. Similar to Kath Albury's (2002) possibilities for ethical heterosex as alternatives to compulsory heterosexuality, nomadic exclusivities involve actively negotiated agreements, open communication, respect and trust. Nomadic exclusivity undermines the binary division between monogamy and non-monogamy. Perhaps this definition is untenable, anyway. Murray (1995: 294) described running nonmonogamy workshops where she asked people to offer their definitions of monogamous relationships:

For some, monogamy means one can have casual sex outside the relationship, but not any emotional attachment. For others, it means love and intimacy are okay, just no sex. For some people the emphasis on monogamy applies to one's own behaviour, for others it applies to one's partner's behaviour. For some people, it means one couldn't even have lunch with or fantasies about anyone who could ever be a prospective sexual partner.

The basis for judging a relationship in terms of nomadic exclusivity can no longer be based on assumptions of the superiority of monogamy, non-monogamy or polyamoury (this involves representation). Instead, we can provide support and encouragement to develop relational skills. If the poststructuralist argument that the basis of ourselves is the result of our practices with others (see e.g. May, 2001), then our capacity to develop relational skills is greatly inhibited by our participation in fixed hierarchies. Here, we practise skills of domination and submission (not the consensual kind), conformity, secrecy, and defensiveness (Schmidt, 2000). In an anarchy of nomadic exclusivity, participants in a relationship create space to discuss, define and refine their boundaries, which are always open to change. Such negotiation is much more difficult in the hierarchical relationships of the workplace and the State apparatus. Participants had a wide variety of arrangements with regards to exclusivity, including not feeling comfortable with their partner enjoying pornography, talking about attractions to others or not, and different agreements about sex with people outside the relationship. None of them took monogamy (whatever that is) for granted, but have actively negotiated their own arrangements for exclusivity. Here are some of their stories.

Melissa's interview illustrates the practice of nomadic exclusivity. She and her partner have had many discussions about boundaries in their relationship. They have agreed not to have sex with other people, unless they are both having sex with a third person. Melissa talked about the importance of respecting her partner's feelings.

If I would be with somebody else it would obviously screw up the whole relationship. I think he would feel so hurt about it. I'm not taking that chance because he's so nice and we have it so good and I like him so much that I wouldn't do it to him.

Their discussions included the possibility of a long-term triad relationship. Specifically, they discussed the possibility of a relationship with a mutual friend.

Melissa: ... because my friend's girlfriend was abroad and they were kind of breaking up but because it wasn't ... because they decided to go back together, it didn't happen and I was quite open to the fact that it would happen but then they got back together. We discussed ... I discussed this with my partner but I didn't dare to suggest it to her at that point yet because I wasn't ... I wanted to also respect her girlfriend. [But . . .] we talked about it and I think that would have been quite cool.

Jamie: He was open to the idea as well?

Melissa: Uh-mm, yeah. That would have been cool. It would have been quite interesting for the both of us.

I asked her if she would like to be in a triad with a man and a woman simultaneously.

Melissa: Well if it makes things difficult then not but if, yes, it should. I think it should be very nice but sometimes I'm not sure if people's emotions are strong enough to handle this kind of thing. Like people think they own their partner but they don't and it's not nothing away from them unless it's really actually tying them to it but on an emotional level, [...] it could be something more. But then again, like I don't think there is a rule. [...] I mean for me to have another woman in the relationship and to respect a woman that much, then I would take a woman into a relationship with the guy and she [...] would have to be really strong and in contact with her emotions and a very balanced person. So and preferably a really, really good friend. So it's kind of ... the criteria are quite high. [...] I'm quite picky.

Jamie: So do you happen to see a three-way relationship as being potentially a really nice thing but not necessarily very likely?

Melissa: Yeah. I mean not very likely in the sense that ... because it's so untraditional and most people don't have the social skills to go through that. Probably that's why. But we're so conditioned into the relationship within two people and it's difficult to think that the intensity that's there with two people can exist between more or that you could have a satisfying relationship but none of the relationship would be that intense, like more liberty and freedom kind of thing. But, yeah, like you said, it's less likely because it has more risks probably.

This exchange about triads illustrates elements of nomadic exclusivity. The borders that define a 'normal relationship' are denied and very non-traditional alternatives are openly discussed. Furthermore, these discussions include an emphasis on respect for herself and her partner (and prospective partners). Boundaries are constructed through a process of open and caring discussion rather than the domination inherent in the borders.

I happened to meet Melissa several months after the interview, where I got an insight into the ongoing process of boundary production and change. Melissa told me how her partner had had an experience where he was very tempted to have sex with someone else. She told me how this had encouraged him to rethink his position of seeing monogamy as a morally superior position. This has further opened discussion between them about possibilities for their own exclusivity arrangements. Melissa is very happy about this, because she does not want to be in a monogamous heterosexual relationship for the rest of her life, but is very happy with her partner. Since then, they had a great threesome with another woman, an experience they are both open to repeating. Melissa is excited about the increasing openness of their discussions and is looking forward to future possibilities of the threesome with another man or having multiple partnerships, though she's very careful not to push these boundaries. Maintaining a good relationship, especially long-distance, is difficult enough, she said, without pushing.

Anne also wants to have a more open relationship, but is aware of her own insecurities.

I feel constrained by the norm, by the monogamy but I dunno whether that's to do with being heterosexual or being part of a pair. I know it's, I know heterosexuality, Christianity go hand in hand but I'm wondering whether the monogamy thing is to do with brought up in a Christian type culture. [...] So, yeah, so that, but then at the same time as I've said, I think I'd feel quite threatened if [he] and I did actually have an open relationship. So I want *me* to have an open relationship and him to not have. [laughter]

Here the emphasis is on respecting her own limits and not pushing herself too much. She talked more about her anxieties.

I'm definitely attracted to the idea of, you know, having an open relationship at some point and, you know, perhaps doing threesome-y things in the future when we're more kind of stable, or when we live together and stuff so it wouldn't necessarily freak me out. I think it would be my natural anxiety which is kind of quite prone to anxiety about stuff like that.

She spoke specifically about her anxieties around threesomes. First, she was concerned about balancing the emotional needs of all three people involved. Second, she talks about her anxieties about her partner's sexuality.



I think I would have problems of, like, jealousy, if, cos in order not to be exploitative, you know, both, both partners have to be incredibly physically and emotionally attentive to the third party and I don't know how I'd feel about [him] paying that much attention to another woman in my, or man, in my presence. [...] So, yeah, I don't think, I don't think I am open to it at the moment.

Yeah. But I think he probably, I think he's vaguely freaked out about the idea of em, yeah, being sexually active with another man in bed. And funnily enough I feel more threatened by the idea of him going with another guy than I do with him going with a woman. [...] Cos of that, that thing about you know, him getting something that I can't offer, you know, a man being able to offer him something that I couldn't and him suddenly going oh my God, all along, I've just, I've been a closet case but I didn't even realise it. [laughs] Anne, I'm leaving you.

These two examples further demonstrate that sexual nomadism does not represent an achievement of complete comfort with sexuality and relationships, but an ongoing process of questioning and undermining the rigid borders of sexual state-forms while acknowledging one's own and others emotional needs for boundaries. This also includes recognising that people make mistakes. Anne had a fling with someone outside of the relationship, which broke her exclusivity agreement with her partner. She spoke a bit about how this affected their relationship.

Jamie: Do you and your partner talk about other people you find attractive?

Anne: Hm mm. A bit. A bit. Ever since that whole thing where [he] found out about that guy [...], and me being in touch with him still, it's been a bit of a moot point between us generally discussing any attraction at all outside each other. I think *we're still trying to reconstruct a sort of safe space in the relationship* but yeah, joking references to pop stars and movie stars and stuff but yeh, no, no not massively. (My emphasis.)

Good relationships, like any form of anarchy, depend very much on trust: trusting each other to maintain boundaries and not hurt each other. Unlike the punishment that comes from breaking the borders of state-forms, whether by the State apparatus or by decentralised forms of policing described in the previous chapter, the breaking of boundaries of trust demands making choices. In this case, Anne and her partner have chosen to reconstruct the safety that boundaries provide. Of course, a crucial aspect of the anarchist tradition is the importance of people choosing their own relationships, referred to as voluntary association (in opposition to

the compulsory association of State and capitalism). Voluntary disassociation (including splitting up or 'trial separation') always remains an option if necessary.

A few people talked about the possibility of their relationships ending in their interviews. Sandra and her partner have openly acknowledged that it may not be 'until death do us part'.

We also, along with our monogamy agreement, we also have made it very plain ... well I've made it very plain and I think he has as well, that I love you, I want to be with you ... if we broke up I would be very upset and cry a lot and things like that but I can live without you and I know that and you know that. So I suppose that kind of tempers any over-emotionalism that goes with feeling jealous or if he was to find somebody else ... I'd be upset no matter who it was but, at the same time, I know I would go on. I've been round the bend before and I'm probably not going to go as far round the bend if it happens with this relationship as I have in the past.

While this may seem a pessimistic approach to relationships, I think it is better to acknowledge the potential for a relationship to end or change than to pretend that it is a fixed and permanent object. As I argue further in the next chapter, resistance depends upon a sense of empowerment, which, in turn, depend upon the intellectual and emotional capacities to recognise choices and feel capable of making the ones we want. If someone feels like they are in a relationship because they have no choice, their sense of empowerment will be diminished.

Of course freedom is meaningless unless it includes the freedom to say no. A segment of my interview with Douglas illustrates this well.

I said 'look, maybe we should just pack it in. Maybe we should just live separately and see each other and be friends and ...'. She said 'no, I don't want that.' I said 'but I want to have relationships. I feel bad that I'm exploring this bit of me that's been on ice for a long time and you're not.' She said 'I don't need it. That's not what I'm looking for'. And she's very straightforward about that. So I have to accept that. But we've tried the mutual release bit [...] saying 'look, would we do this again? We'd certainly do it once but would we do it twice?' I think, in wisdom, if ever I was doing it again, I would probably want to live with somebody rather than get married or ... live with a woman or have lived with men first ... do you know what I mean? It's worked out the way it's worked out. This is where we are now. [...] we're lucky that we've got what we've got.

This example might seem very unusual in comparison to many people's relationships. But, I suggest such open discussion about future possibilities may make explicit what happens implicitly. Partnerships, like any form of social organisation, are not fixed objects but ongoing processes. They are continuously produced and negotiated. Acknowledging this process allows for more active participation and nomadism. Like any other anarchy, a good relationship is based on participatory democracy. If we fail to recognise our capacity to change our relationships, whether with friends, partners or 'authorities', we are doomed to remain trapped within the borders of state-forms. This nomadism shares a certain similarity to Giddens' (1992) concept of the 'pure relationship' which he also suggests should not necessarily last until death. This is comparable to the superficial similarities between capitalism and anarchism, in that both advocate versions of individual freedom. Giddens' individualistic contractual understanding of relationships -- 'What holds the pure relationship together is the acceptance on the part of each partner, "until further notice", that each gains sufficient benefit from the relation to make its continuance worthwhile' (p 63) -- is entirely compatible with capitalism. Nomadic relationships, on the other hand, are held together by an ethic of mutual aid which may not be permanent, but cannot be ended so callously as giving notice as one might to a landlord or boss.

While we do have the capacity to change our relationships and choose how we would live our lives, this is not necessarily an easy process. Resisting borders requires a great deal of effort. The examples of policing from the previous chapter are not easily overcome, but doing so brings its rewards. In the next chapter, I come back to discuss in greater depth what it is that enables people to continue to effectively resist orientation.

## **Complexities of Desire**

According to the state-form of sexual orientation, our sexual desires for other people can be categorised according to gender. This definition assumes that sexual practice, sexual desire and gender are all easily contained concepts that can be understood simply in relation to each other. Of course, real-life is more complicated than this. In the participants' narratives, concepts of desire, sex and gender were all contested, and the relationships between them complex.

Beth and Melissa described how sexual attraction is in some ways similar to attraction to people they like or love, but with whom they do not want to have sex.

Beth: Well, I mean, I guess I'm attracted to people's faces and their looks, mostly their faces and I'm attracted to people who are confident but I don't know, I can't really separate sexual attraction from liking people.

Melissa: And what's attraction anyway? Like I've felt attracted to my sister and my brother and both of my sisters but just ... but I wouldn't do anything and I wouldn't get arousal from that. I just think that they're really nice people and they're beautiful and intellectual and interesting but I'm not sure if that counts as a desire.

At the same time, sexual attraction can be different from other experiences of physical attraction. In the first example, Anne describes how her male partner fancies some men without wanting to have sex with them. In the second, Diane talks about sexual attraction to a man she does not 'fancy'.

Anne: Yeah, yeah. He does, he kind of fancies some men but ... I think he fancies Brad Pitt and George Clooney and, but he doesn't, but he, he wouldn't want to kiss them. We have this whole conversation about what do you mean, you fancy them? What does that mean? Would you want to kiss them. Oh no. Would you want to be naked with them? No. I just think they're really good looking. And I think they're really attractive. So I suppose he's like the idea of the kind of model unhung-up straight guy [...]. [Laughter]

Diane: He's not somebody that I fancy but there's a sexual attraction. I mean I think a lot of the attraction comes through the quite deep emotional connection we have there because I feel so close with him. It's quite easy. It's quite comfortable and it's quite good fun to express that closeness sexually as well. [...] I can acknowledge, act upon a sexual attraction, sexual interaction, a sexual dynamic with somebody but they might not be somebody that I overtly fancy [...]. I consider him attractive but I don't necessarily actively fancy him myself but I can tell there's a sexual something in the way we interact and pursue that.

It is also possible to have very different experiences of desire. Douglas, who described his sexual desires primarily in terms of men, talked about the possibilities of desiring women.

I find myself on the verge of falling in love with women and thinking about what they're like to be in bed with and thinking about enjoying their bodies but not enough to ever ... I mean it's quite a different quality. It's quite different from what happens when I'm thinking about men but it's ... I find them seductive. [...] a woman who was absolutely charming could keep

me entertained all day. I could cope with that for quite a long time.  
[LAUGHS]

Furthermore, as several people noted, physical attractiveness is greatly modified by one's perception of another's personality, intellect, emotions, etc. Kev described this sort of experience.

I know there have been times that I've just been talking ... or being in a pub, there'd be someone sitting across from you, maybe a group of friends where you don't know the person [...] and you get introduced and find you don't think about them particularly but later in the evening you start talking to them and they're talking about something really interesting and you get on really well with them and suddenly, when you look at them, you begin thinking 'oh, they've got really nice eyes' or they've got a really nice body, something you looked at to start with but it just didn't register for some reason and suddenly it's like, how could I not see how attractive you are? It could be partly the alcohol, given the time. I suppose it happens in non-pub situations sometimes. Even at work here, you can be talking to someone who's maybe visiting your work and when you first meet them, there's nothing ... you know, you might not be able to remember them next day and yet when you talk to them, you get on really well and suddenly [...] they've got beautiful eyes or whatever.

Finally, Laurence had this to say about the nature of desire.

Attraction's attraction. It comes from a place that you can't really understand and that's one of the most attractive things. It's the most exciting thing. You can't really try and rationalise or try and analyse too much why you find what you find attractive or desire because if you do, you tend to cease to find it desirable. If you pick apart a comedian and ask is that line funny? Let's go through it 1000 times and work out the timing of it and then it'll cease to be funny. But this should be just taken for what they have and kind of enjoy it or revel but ... I do unfortunately think that, for a large chunk of society, it would be stupid to ignore the fact that there is still an awful lot of fear and persecution against different sexualities.

Laurence's analysis of attraction addresses key issues: attraction is something we can't understand completely; it should be really nice, but is the source of much anxiety. Desire is nomadic, it evades categorisation as these examples demonstrate. To better understand the important human experiences understood as attraction or desire, I turn now that which is desired rather than the 'nature' of desire itself.

That which was desired in participants' stories could be described as 'erotic intimacy'. By this I mean a warm connection between human beings that includes a sense of sharing that 'spark' associated with sex, but also sometimes found in other intense or deep connections with other people. The first element for developing any sense of erotic intimacy is sufficient trust to lower barriers. Douglas described this as 'being allowed. When someone allows you into their physical space, it's a lovely, lovely feeling'. For him, his 'most immediate sexual fantasy is about being in physical contact with another man, just having hands-on with another man. It doesn't need to elaborate or ... it's just about connection and comfort'. This sense of comfort or security must also allow space for the shifting of boundaries, for radical change, for exciting possibilities, for elements of chaos.

Security and possibilities of radical and exciting changes are often presented as antithetical. Safety is boring, and risk is exciting. Security means exercising as much control as possible. This rhetoric fits neatly with the state-form. Governments respond to risk and danger with legislation. The state-form is a process of containment, of control. Anarchy, the state of no one being in control, is presented as absolute chaos. Participants descriptions of erotic intimacy suggests that security and openness to change are deeply intertwined. Together, they are enabled by a nomadic resistance to representation, including a respect for boundaries.

Boundaries, unlike borders, are continuously developed in relation to individuals' needs in a particular context. For Alasdair, intimacy with men outside his marriage has strict boundaries. His desire for men, he said, is 'a physical urge. I don't really have the strong emotional urge to relate to a guy. I think if it was placing my marriage under threat I would put the marriage first.' And Erica emphasised the importance of respecting her boundaries, including a nice example of casual respectful intimacy.

It's more like when people don't have attitudes that put me off because there are some attitudes. People who like to be really pushy and get really, really flirty straight away sometimes really turn me off unless I'm in a situation where everybody's just coming on to everybody else because it's like that sort of situation and it feels safe and then it's fine. [...] Like I can get really pissed off getting comments in the street, but some comments are really nice. One guy once walked past me and just said 'your tattoo's the coolest thing I've seen all day', and then just walked off and that sort of thing is really nice, that sort of interaction. It was like 'yeah, I really like you and it was really nice to see in the street' but that's OK. I'm not

expecting you to give me your phone number or something. Yeah, kind of like, yeah, I'm here. You're nice. You're there and I like you or whatever and that's it. Just laid back.

Several participants mentioned the appeal of characteristics such as confident, comfortable and laid back. These characteristics provide a sense of security precisely because they allow for change. Anita and Kev described what they found appealing about an ex-girlfriend and a current partner respectively.

Anita: Physical things but self-confidence as well actually. When I first met my first girlfriend, I met her at work and she was ... she had long hair, which was rainbow coloured. She had all ... loads of different stripes all different colours and she was wearing fuck off big Doc Marten boots and blue overalls and things and she was ... she just didn't give a shit what anybody else thought and I was very, very shy at the time and it took me a long time before I could even dye my hair a different colour without thinking everybody would be staring at me. That was in those days. And so her self-confidence in those ways were what attracted me to her and that she was very wild and different herself, very non-judgemental about anybody else.

Kev: The first thing I remember noticing was he was in a social situation and he sort of came in and sat down as if he'd known everyone for a long time even though he didn't know any of them and just chatted to them and he was very at ease and it was kind of ... he tended to stand out from the rest of the people because no one else was like that. So I think he was the centre of attention but he was very much ... he made everyone aware of him but not in a bad way. And a cheeky grin. ... I can be more outgoing when he's around because he's outgoing so it makes me feel more relaxed but I also tend to maybe talk about stuff I wouldn't talk about without him. With him, I talk about stuff I wouldn't normally have talked about with someone else even if I'd been close to them, just because he's so open about everything.

If it is true both that people are works in progress and that identity develops through relationships, then relationships with people who are confident, open and non-judgmental (i.e. who avoid representation), provides security because they allow for change. These characteristics enable change for all participants in the relationship, creating the conditions for both security and stimulation.

The experiences of erotic intimacy described by participants included a desire for stimulation, for having boundaries safely and respectfully stretched. Phyllis, Mark, Melissa and Laurence each described this in different ways, talking about what was important in a

sexual partner to them.

Phyllis: Right, just for sex. Somebody who was sensitive and ... physically sensitive I mean, would react to what I did, and somebody who could also swap roles quite nicely so there's not always somebody who's in charge and somebody who isn't. Somebody who could do that stuff and somebody who's prepared to be rough and can push quite hard as well, not always just to be nice and cute. I want someone who can play and knows where the boundaries are but can push quite hard. Someone I'd like to kiss. That would be important. Someone who's willing to experiment as well, who's willing to do things and not be completely shocked. If I'd be in bed with a bloke and I said 'I want to stick something up your arse', and if they went 'get off me' I'd be out of there like a shot. If somebody said 'oh, well, that sounds quite interesting. Let's try that sometime', I'd think that'll be interesting. Yes, I'd want somebody who was really open-minded and just going away and just see what happened without being fanatical about it.

Mark: ... 'willingness to experiment' I suppose or something like that.

Melissa: ... playful, open minded as in attracted to other things and experimental, understanding in the sense that respectful to my ideas.

Laurence: Personality wise, mostly enthusiasm, enthusiasm and passion for interests really and a sense of just trying to take as much as they can from life. [...] I can look back and see, running through them all, there was a kind of a passion and enthusiasm, never moreso than [my current partner]. So I think that's probably the main element that I would find because it kind of reassures me about the things that I'm passionate about and things that I can get inspired by and somebody who's interested and interesting and interested in their own things.

The eroticism in these descriptions is respectful, but not staid. It is unlike the rationality of bureaucracy, whether State or corporate run. Indeed, a revolutionary question is why eroticism is perceived as only possible in sex. 'Eroticism is exciting, life would be a drab routine without at least that spark. That's the point. Why has all the joy and excitement been concentrated, driven into that one narrow, difficult-to-find alley of human experience, and all the rest laid to waste? There's plenty to go around within the spectrum of our lives' (Firestone, 1970 cited in Notes from Nowhere, 2003:175). Of course, another revolutionary question is why sex is constructed as such a 'narrow and difficult-to-find alley'. Erotic intimacy may also provides an insight into political debates over sameness versus difference. As folk singer, Ani DiFranco (1994) sings,

'cause i know there is strength  
in the differences between us



and i know there is comfort  
where we overlap

Politics of sameness, which conceal or ignore difference, are interdependent with the representationalist ethic of the state-form. Like erotic intimacy, nomadic forms of political organisation recognise the value in a difference and having overlap. As Chaia Heller envisions, 'an erotic democracy [...] decentralizes power and allows for direct, passionate participation in the decisions that determine our lives' (1993:240). Both erotic intimacy and erotic democracy are clearly incompatible with the shame and violence that both support and are supported by the state-form.

### Gender and Desire

Another aspect of the state-form of sexual orientation is the production of the idea that gender and desire are neatly related to each other. Do you fancy men, women or both? Supposedly, this is an easy question to which everyone should have a simple answer. As the examples from the previous sections demonstrate, even the question of what it means to fancy someone is difficult enough, before we begin to acknowledge the complexities of gender. Participants relationships to gender and desire was not straightforward.

Not only is desire supposedly to be represented in terms of 'men' and 'women', but what constitutes a desirable man or woman is also produced through representation, most obviously in the corporate media. Many of the participants clearly rejected dominant representations of desirable gender. Neither hyper-femininity nor hyper-masculinity were considered attractive in the participants' descriptions. Many of the participants expressed a preference for people who exhibit a mix of gendered characteristics. In the following four examples, Beth, Sandra, Eva and Kev talked about their desires for people who do not conform to gender standards.

Beth: I'm just not gendered. I don't ... it's fine in other people but I don't like it in myself. I don't like it in my relationships. I think that ... with my partner, we've been ... yeah, and I think that definitely influences my sexuality. I think that's the kind of ... you know, you're asking 'do you think sexuality is a big part of you?' No, but I think being not of a specific gender is quite a big part of me. And I think that kind of comes out of that. I think I'm quite lucky with the partner that I've got because he's not

particularly gendered either although ... I don't know if he would say that in so many words but he's quite sort of ... he's quite sort of flexible in what he does. [...] I think he's kind of ... he fairly sort of in-between and he does lots of things like Scottish people consider to be quite feminine like he eats loads of chocolate and he likes shopping and he watches *ER* and *Sex in the City* and stuff but like physically and his past experience, he quite stereotypically masculine because he was a handball player and he did his military service and stuff like that. Yeah, he's a bit of a mixture.

Sandra: Androgyny. I like not butch women but kind of dykey, kind of androgynous, kind of together. I don't know what label to use for that kind of women, and I like softer men. Androgyny.

Eva: I think with boys I basically just appreciate any that aren't stereotypical generic straight males. Anyone that can just go beyond the norm a bit I greatly appreciate and I love camp straight boys.

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Kev: Purely on physical stuff, I tend to be attracted to more men than women but I'm not sure how much that is the idea that it's a man or a woman or the looks, especially at the moment, the current looks for women, I don't find attractive. It's the too skinny, too made up, too artificial look. Whereas, I suppose if you put me in a place where there were lots of much better built, muscular women then I'd be much ... more likely to look at the women than the men. I don't fancy the wee skimpy frail waif-like women that I'm surrounded by. I don't know. I'm not really sure. Again, I do get ... I am more attracted to men but I'm not sure how much that is put on mannerisms as opposed to the actual essential attributes as it were. If I think about it, the women I'm attracted to, they are more what you tend to call 'masculine' in some ways but not in the sort of big, butch, hairy ways.

Jamie: In what ways?

Kev: The kind of build. The more solid build. I don't like women who look like you might snap them in half if you're having sex with them. And the same with men. I don't like really skinny men either. I don't like ... I'm not usually attracted to women with very large breasts. I like small breasts. But I don't go for boyish looking women. I just go for sort of like a substantial solidness and then again like women with some degree of muscles, I find much more attractive. Whereas I'm not so ... I'm probably not so much worried about that with men because men tend to be on the whole more solid even if they are less muscley. Whereas I think a lot of women look better with muscle. Yeah. [...] when I say I like solid women, I think it's a personality thing too. I don't like the sort of helpless femme. I like self-confident-but-not-pushy femme as well. So a similar attitude in many women I find attractive. [...] Thinking back in the 90's, [...] there seemed to be more muscley, well-built women around. I had a flat mate, in the place I shared, for 3 months and she was ... she played sports a lot.

She wasn't ... didn't look like a body builder or anything big. She just was always very active and her look was very ... it was sort of like a nicer version of Sporty Spice. It's that kind of crop top, slightly muscled arms and there was a lot of that about. That was great. There were so many women I found attractive then. But that seems to have gone away again. It's gone back to being the stick insect look. So I don't think my preferences have changed...

These examples provide further support for an argument that desire must be understood in relative and contextual terms, rather than the absolutes presented by the idea of sexual orientation. Kev, for example, may be understood to have become 'more gay,' in terms of a Kinsey scale, but it might make more sense to place emphasis on the changing social context and body ideals for women. 'Fancying' 'women' is not a singular fixed reality, but a complex historical construction. Likewise, Beth's, Eva's and Sandra's preferences for not-particularly-gendered, camp and androgynous people depends upon particular social conditions that produce those gendered possibilities. At the same, these desires are nomadic in that they resist categorisation. Although Eva's desire for camp straight boys, for example, is intelligible only because of shared cultural understandings gender and sexuality, there is no state-form, no 'oh, she's one of those! You know what they are like!'

Participants' descriptions of the relationship between gender and desire for them was not limited to preferences for strong women or gentle men. A few people described how they found other people playing with gender to be very appealing.

Erica: I really like it when I see people who are quite to play with their gender. If I know ... if I see a man, who I know to be quite straight or at least have relationships with women but turns up at a party in a dress or something [...] oh, just like there was one time, there was this Basque woman used to cut my hair back when I had money for haircuts and the first time she cut my hair, she just had the sort of long dark hair and the makeup and she was very beautiful and very kind of ... you know, what hairdressers are like, all trendy and stuff, and the next time I had a haircut, she'd shaved her hair off. I thought 'wow! That is just so sexy.' Not just because she looked gorgeous but also because she'd done it. She had all that Mediterranean girly image and she just gave it up. She was fed up, and I thought 'yes!' I really like that. That's gorgeous. But then there are lots of people that I find sexy are not like that.

Phyllis: I think it's great when men dress up as women. I really like that and it is quite exciting as well. [...] I like ... it's the whole fluidity thing about people taking on different roles and identities and that being completely OK and normal and people should be doing it. If you want to

wear a skirt, wear a skirt. You know, I wear trousers. Who cares? If you want to wear a flowery hat, wear your flowery hat. It shouldn't matter. But when you're talking about desire ... yeah, it's nice. I like seeing ... there's nothing like a nice skirt on a bloke. [...] you kind of lose something about ... you lose something about the groin and all that stuff. And the woman with the square clothes, you see the curves inside all the more. [...] And men in drag as opposed to kind of wearing a skirt, which I think is different, is not a turn-on for me at all. I mean it's fun and it's interesting but it's not like a sexy thing for me at all. I mean *Priscilla* was fantastic but no, I didn't want to sleep with any of them, no.

Other possible relationships between gender and desire include attractions to transgender expressions. Meg described a number of experiences and fantasy scenarios that nomadic evade binary gender.

Meg: I mean I have been out with a bloke who had hormone treatment as a kid and well, in fact, actually, there's was another lover who ... there was another lover I found myself with who didn't talk about it but obviously had had some gender ambiguities. [...] Yeah, or fantasy stuff like either threesomes or where I've got any bits or I can feel through the end of my dick, [...] and sometimes ... I mean when it's actual dream, I just do have that or I'll sort of be a bloke in a dream or whatever. That's not a problem.

Jamie: Are there any particular gender ambiguities or combinations that are more appealing than others or ...?

Meg: Everything. Everything please! Everything please, with chocolate sauce!

In other narratives, gender difference was seen as very significant in participants' experiences of desire. For Alasdair, desire for certain sexual practices differed depending on the gender of the partner.

I can enjoy being dominated by a man in a way that I wouldn't expect to [enjoy being dominated] by a woman.

Meanwhile, Pete talked about how he can imagine particular types of intimacy with men, but not others.

...but falling in love, yeah, I could actually fall in love with somebody of the same gender. On the other side, having a sexual relationship, I could imagine less than that. I think love is, for me, something more between ... something a deep understanding, a deep feeling, togetherness feeling, whereas, with sexual ... with sex there is more comes to that. [...] I'm not

sure because you could really fall in love with somebody and be just don't want to have sex with that person. I think that's totally possible. How to define that? Mostly heterosexual, they are different by sexual orientation. I don't put ... I don't mix this sex together with love. For me it's something separate.

For Anita, gender in the sense of butch/femme is entirely irrelevant to her, while at the same time she has only ever been sexually attracted to women.

It's interesting because I'm so not into the whole butch/femme thing that I don't quite understand how it works but for me, but for male/female ... I think part of it's politics as well, to be honest, because [...] I have quite a lot of gay male friends and I'm really, really close to some of them but they still don't carry that same experience of oppression I guess and I think that much as things are a lot different now than what they used to be, there's still that experience like you know a wife becoming the property of the guy, for example. It's still there. Woman can't get high up in the church. It's still there. All the leaders are all white men. It's still there. And about a couple of years ago, Pride was about the right to marry, the right for queer people to be married and it was like, yeah, all the guy's thought it was really good, we totally had the right to marry and I'd marry my boyfriend and I was like, how could you ... because marriage is all about male power over women. How could you be into that? And so I think the politics in terms of gender politics is quite important as well, which is also I think why there's a difference for me between male/female and butch/femme.

Finally, Sandra and Meg described how their relationships were somewhat exceptional in terms of usual patterns of gender and desire. Sandra, who prefers women's bodies is in a relationship with a man, and Meg is a relationship with a man who, apart from her, has only ever been sexually attracted to men.

Sandra: I respond to women's bodies. I don't respond to men's bodies. I think men's bodies are weird. No offence but they are kind of weird.

Jamie: I won't take it personally.

Sandra: My partner knows this too. I've said 'that is pretty damn weird.' And he goes 'yeah, it is kind of.'

Jamie: Does it seem like you're in a mixed relationship?

Sandra: Yeah. Guys are different. Guys are definitely different. Yeah. I don't understand how it can work. It just seems too unnatural to me. I just don't understand how it can work.

Jamie: But it has been for a while.

Sandra: For us it has, yeah. I mean ... but I think he's different even. One night we were in the kitchen and I was ... I had him in my arms and I said 'you are such a beautiful woman. Ohhh, shit.' And I was like ... and he said 'I know how you feel about women. Thank you.' I was like 'whoa! Whoa!' Because I was like 'I didn't mean that. You're not a woman. I don't think of you ... I respect your masculinity. I know you're a man. I don't want you to be anybody but who you are.' He was like 'It's OK.' I said 'are you sure? I didn't mean it. I wasn't thinking of anybody but you.'

Jamie: But he was fine?

Sandra: Yeah, that's not typical.

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Meg: Well, it's very flattering to be told 'I don't really fancy women but I fancy you'. Very flattering [...] I might be putting words in his mouth slightly there. It was very romantic. It's very ... it gives me a special little place.

As we can see from these diverse examples, there is no particular fixed pattern to the relationship between gender and desire. Nor is any particular pattern more nomadic than any other. These examples are all equally nomadic because they defy categorisation. Nor would I suggest that these individuals' desires are more nomadic than other people's, but simply that their nomadism is more obvious. No one's life really fits into the boxes produced through representation, but the shame and violence described in the previous chapter encourages us to work to maintain the illusion they do. Furthermore, these diverse examples of nomadism demonstrate the possibility of resisting heteronormativity without recourse to homosexual identity, and homonormativities without necessarily having to claim queer or bisexual identity. It is possible to resist orientation through an infinite variety of nomadic possibilities. Fictions may be necessary, but there are no particular necessary fictions.

## **The Relational Construction of 'Sex'**

Participants' nomadism was not limited to identities, relationships and desires. Even the notion of 'sex' was open to negotiation. In particular, participant narratives addressed were constituted sex for them in relation to BDSM and the gendered dimensions of sexual practice.

The issue of S/M play came up in several of the interviews as an example of how what constitutes 'sex' or 'sexual' is produced between people. Playing devil's advocate, I encouraged Anita to explore her understanding of S/M as part of her sexuality.

Anita: Sexuality doesn't have to be based on sex as such. [...] you don't have to get off with someone to be sexual.

Jamie: You mean orgasmic getting off?

Anita: Yeah, orgasmic getting off. And so, for me, S/M is part of my sexuality and that it is a sexual thing but I can also do S/M without having sex and without it actually being particularly sexual but that's still part of my sexuality in that I do get off on S/M but the two are not necessarily happening at the same time.

Jamie: Is there an orgasmic getting off?

Anita: Totally. It's like an endorphin rush rather than an orgasmic thing, an orgasm, endorphin rush, sometimes you get both at the same time. Sometimes they're separate. I do a lot of things where there's no actual genital stuff going on at all. I still have my sexuality but it's not overtly sexual but I'm getting a huge rush from it all the same and it's still intense in that way that sexual stuff is intense.

Jamie: Is it sexually arousing?

Anita: It can be. It doesn't have to be.

Jamie: So it's arousing or thrilling?

Anita: Thrilling, I guess. I mean thrilling is sort of ... that sounds different. Arousing as in a sexually arousing sort of way, but thrilling in an endorphin rush sort of way, yeah.

Jamie: An endorphin rush you can get from skydiving, but people wouldn't consider that part of their sexuality probably.

Anita: No, it's the same thing, isn't it? An endorphin rush. [...] But I think there's a difference there in that skydiving, for example, you get the endorphin rush with doing something really scary but you're doing it all within yourself. You're not getting the endorphin transfer from another person. I think that's what the difference is. It makes it more sexually oriented rather than skydiving. You're getting that from another person like you would if you were having sex with them. Whereas skydiving, you're just jumping out of a plane.

For Anita, S/M constitutes a part of her sexuality; despite debates about whether or not pain

and sensation play can be considered 'sex', it clearly falls within the realms of erotic intimacy. The endorphin rush and potential for orgasm Anita described is the erotic spark, but, unlike skydiving, S/M involves intimacy. Anita refers to S/M as part of her sexuality because it constitutes a particularly valued and desired form of erotic intimacy for her.

However, for two other participants who had been sexually abused as children, bondage, restraint and domination play stirred up painful emotions. What constitutes the erotic intimacy for some crosses an important boundary for others.

Erica: I'm not into S&M in a big way. I'm not into bondage and that sort of fetish stuff and anything that involves any violence, like objects really freak me out. For a long time I wasn't into sex toys at all because using objects really freaked me out. Less so now. [...] But, yeah, mostly sort of violent domination stuff. I can really understand that some people are into it but I'm really not at all.

Sandra: [Childhood sexual abuse] reared its ugly little head the first time I had a relationship with a man, actually, because I think I blocked it out for a lot of years, to tell you the truth. [...] It is possible to do that and I did ... because I did and it didn't come up. [...] It came up because I was in situations where I'd be in bed with my male partner and he would just like have me pinned down or something, like in fun, holding my wrists down and ... and I would go into 'survive' mode like fight back, 'I'm going to kill you' mode and he's like 'what's going on?' Which, of course, he would. [...] And so I would comfort him because 'I don't want you to be scared of me. I'm sorry. Because I knew that you weren't doing anything to me. I knew that we were just playing. We were just rolling around or having a laugh or whatever and then something happened and I don't know what that was but I'm sorry for that.' And so I would comfort him and little by little it was like 'Ahhh, now I remember that. Oh.' And so ... I mean now I know some stuff like that, like 'don't pin my arms down or I'll kill you.' And so, in relationships since then, I've said 'look, I've got certain rules here. Don't do that to me or I'm gonna ... I can't be responsible. I will fight back. It doesn't matter what you mean by it. It will be seen as an act of aggression so don't do it.' When you're in a relationship with somebody, you learn what their vulnerabilities are and you don't play on them. It's part of being in a relationship.

For Erica and Sandra, these boundaries are important for protecting and their vulnerabilities, as Sandra puts it. While I have argued that boundaries are flexible and negotiable in contrast to borders, this example requires a qualification. If the poststructuralist argument on the potential fluidity of the self is accurate, it is possible that Erica and Sandra could explore these boundaries and redefine the meaning of power play, like Erica described her efforts with



a partner to redefine the meaning of sex and virginity with her partner (see Chapter Five). However, individuals have limited energy with which to negotiate the the difficulties of hierarchical social life and must protect themselves. So, just because boundaries are potentially flexible and negotiable does not mean that they should always be changed. There is no great pressing need for Erica or Sandra to enjoy S/M.

Phyllis, on the other hand, does seem to have such a need. With a great sense shame, Phyllis described a strong sexual attraction to (fantasy) violence.

Phyllis: I mean I think I probably get more violent in my fantasies than I would ever, ever feel comfortable with in real life and so that's kind of scary, I suppose, because I think where am I going to go with that? How far am I going to take it?

Jamie: And by violence, do you mean like S&M or consensual S&M or do you mean kind of violent ...?

Phyllis: No, more kind of rape, kind of violent things, yeah, which I just know ... I know because I've also been sexually attacked a couple of times. I just know they're not a turn-on. [...] But then reading things like ... is it *My Mother's Garden*?<sup>11</sup> that actually made me feel a lot better about them. I thought, well this is completely normal. It doesn't lead anywhere. It doesn't mean that you're going to go out and rape somebody, you know, so why not? [...]

Jamie: What kind of stories or images you find particularly sexy.

Phyllis: Again, I think ones that involve violence. I think that's why it's quite shocking when you read something and it's about somebody suffering some form of sexual violence. You think well, it's on the page. It's not doing anyone any harm. Go with it.

The intensity of Phyllis's emotions -- shame and desire -- for her violent sexual fantasies indicated a need to explore further. Fortunately, her partner was very open to exploration.

He's got some handcuffs and some foot cuffs and stuff so we've been playing around with them but very gently at the moment, I think, because we don't actually know what's going to work and what isn't going to work. So we're going quite gently. But, again, that's a nice surprise for me because I think I'm actually ... in a way I'm kind of getting near what some of my fantasies are but in a really safe place, which I've never even started to do before. So, yeah, that's good.

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11 A collection of women's sexual fantasies edited by Nancy Friday.

Unlike Erica and Sandra, whose boundaries around S/M were very firm for good reasons, Phyllis and her partner have been gently stretching boundaries and exploring areas of shame and desire.

Although S/M is often considered at the fringes of sex, it highlights the elements at the core of erotic intimacy: pleasure and danger, vulnerability and trust, shame and desire. Perhaps these are even at the core of what it means to be human, as sex writer Simon Sheppard argues:

For me, power-based play is a great way to find out who I am, who other people are, and to have a damn good time while I'm doing it. And, yes, it scary to be vulnerable. Vulnerable to restraints, signal whips, the pleas of a bottom, the demands of a top. Vulnerable to desire, to love, to life. But without vulnerability you might as well be dead. One way or another, we're all gonna get hurt. Because life is dangerous. (Sheppard, 2000: xiii)

## Sex & Gender

As feminist theorists have long pointed out, sexual orientation is a crucial nexus of gender oppression. In particular, through the concept of the heterosexual matrix, Judith Butler (1990, 1993) argues that the oppositional and hierarchical binarisms of 'sex' and 'gender' (in itself a false dichotomy) are made intelligible through the compulsory practice of heterosexuality. Nomadic constructions of sex that evade heterogendered borders disrupt the heterosexual matrix and the state-forms of sexual orientation.

Phallogentric definitions of sex helped to produce, and are produced by, the gender order. The pleasures of sex between women demonstrates alternatives to placing a man's cock at the centre of any definition of sex. This has been one important source of inspiration for nomadic explorations of sexual possibilities. In Sandra's experience, bodily differences allowed for different sexual possibilities.

Sandra: ... to tell you the truth. I mean if people say 'oh it's ridiculous. What can women do with each other?' Then I'll say 'well, what do people do with each other? Like are you so unimaginative that you can't imagine like just being together being a turn on or whatever.' Lesbians are renowned to have hours and hours and hours and hours of kissing. I've been there. Five hours later you're unable to walk and it's like 'what's that about?' I don't know if gay men do it. I don't know if straight couple do it. I've never done it with anybody but a woman. I mean guys have stubble.

Diane's experience of negotiating sex with men after coming out of a lesbian identity further demonstrates the hyper-significance attached to sex between men and women.

Diane: With guys it's been kissing, touching, sort of dick, cunt, fucking, going down on each other. [...] Whereas with women there's been a lot more to it in the sense that I've had a lot more sexual experience with women and so, yeah, kissing and touching and oral sex, I guess. Women ... fucking in all sorts of ways because it's so different. Finger fucking, fucking with objects, dildoes, whatever, strap-on fucking as well as by hand, fisting, both ways. I like fisting. [...] Anal sex as well although I don't find many women that are into it although I'm quite into it so I'm more likely to get fucked than they are and that's either with fingers or toys. There's a little bit of sucking off in a kind of strapped on kind of way. So, yeah, 69 kind of sex. In terms of ... there's just much more things that I've done ...

Jamie: Because of particular people or trust issues or ...?

Diane: Some of it's to do with the length of time I've been involved with women as opposed to guys. Some of it's to do with, I suppose how well I know somebody. Some of it's to do with trust to some extent in terms of the whole kind of larger male/female dynamic in society does come in to it [...] some of it's that kind of confidence/trust thing. But some of it's just opportunity as to what's come up between us and stuff. I mean the stuff I've done with the guy, it's not that I'm restricting it to that. It's just that I haven't found myself in a situation where we've done anything else really.

Jamie: Do you find male/female dynamic ... That broader things affect the specific relationship heavily?

Diane: Yes and no. I mean I find that it affects my feelings about it. I have to be much more careful about getting into a relationship with a guy because of the larger dynamic and it could so easily just fall in ... because as well it's the male-female thing you can easily fall into this straight blueprint that I don't want to it to go into. So the fact that I'm queer comes first and then as to whether anything else is going to happen ... that it's not just like 'I'm a girl and he's a boy kind of thing and we're going to get it on.' It's like 'OK, I'm a dyke and he's a boy and we're going to get it on' but get it on within that context with him. So it does affect it. [...] I'm much more confident with women than I am with guys because I've had more sex with women than guys so I feel I know what I'm doing although it doesn't seem that difficult really. It's just like another person in that sense and always when you get to know an individual and what does it for them and what they're into it and you build a dynamic between you so it's treating it like that, it's just the same in a way.

Jamie: And do you find that guys have trouble having non-heterosexual, male/female sex?

Diane: No. What? In the sense of ... yeah ... no, in the sense of interacting with me in the context that I'm queer is fine. It seems to work out fine. Whatever we do seems to work out fine. It's not sort of [...] the fucking thing didn't come into it 'til quite a bit later kind of thing. It was a lot more kind of exploratory and a lot more like lesbian sex sort of thing in a way. So the male/female fucking thing would come into it later.

Jamie: And is that ... is it especially significant or is it just ...?

Diane: No, it wasn't except I suddenly thought 'oh my goodness, does that mean I'm not a virgin anymore?' It was like 'oh'. The significance was there was that thought afterwards, 'am I going to tarnish my perfect lesbian career?' And birth control. That was the biggest issue around it. So I've got to think about contraception. I hadn't had to think about this for months. I thought about it when first starting out as a teenager or whatever and so you get to think about it a bit then and then I just hadn't had to. Safe sex has always been a consideration but contraception ....? I've often wondered whether that's why I'm more into women than men because it's easier in that respect. There's not that fear that goes with it. You don't have to worry about pregnancy.

Diane has had to negotiate a number of new issues in having sex with men. While the risk of pregnancy associated with one particular sexual practice can be understood as largely ahistorical, notions of virginity and a 'perfect lesbian career' are clearly aspects of sexual state-forms. Diane and her male partners have worked to nomadically evade the overcoding of their sexual practices as heterosexual. Understanding their experiences as dyke & boy sex rather than in terms of a 'straight blueprint' seems to have proved a successful tactic for queering apparently 'heterosexual' practices.

The possibility of queer or nomadic sexual practice within male-female relationships was important to many of the participants. Erica and Phyllis described how they valued evading the 'straight blueprint' as Diane put it, though for Phyllis these negotiations are limited by a long-distance relationship that often only allowed weekends together. Negotiating and practising nomadic sex requires more time than following sexual scripts.

Jamie: Do you think your sex life with your lover would be different if you were both straight?

Erica: Yeah. It would be boring.

Jamie: How's that?

Erica: A lot of the fun that we have is actually about how our sexuality

has evolved in lots of different ways, not just the sort boy/girl kind of thing. So ... we went through a small thing that I sort of studied something about male and female anatomy and I kept talking about how genitals start off as something, not necessarily male or female and sort kept identifying bits of our genitals that actually corresponded to each other and stuff and ... yeah, I sort of clicked [and we started] talking about rubbing our clits together. That's the sort of thing that I really liked that I know that I couldn't have if we were straight. I won't say straight people have boring sex lives (but I think some do actually from what I hear) but it's more like I think, for us, it probably would be quite boring because a lot of things that we really enjoy, we wouldn't do and ... yeah. So it's good.

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Phyllis: When we first started seeing each other, I didn't have any contraception because we couldn't deal with condoms at all and because I've been pregnant before, I'm really pretty careful. Then I had the coil put in and a bloody nightmare, and the emphasis on the 'blood'. It was a bloody nightmare and so we couldn't actually have penetrative sex for ages. [...] so we spent a lot of time just doing non-penetrative things, which was really good because I think we really got to know each other. So now, if we're not doing penetrative for any reason, then we're completely unfazed by it. We just carry on just saying well, we know other things to do and it's not like 'oh, we're doing second best here' or 'oh, we better think of something now'. We do all kinds of things and that happens to be one of them and what was weird for me as well was the penetrative sex wasn't actually completely different from all the other stuff that we'd been doing. It was just another thing that we were doing to communicate, which was completely weird for me as well because before, again, with straight men or with my husband as well, it's like 'I want to get it in there and then I'm going to bang away and then I'm going to come'. And this guy is just doing all kinds of different things and that's one of them and if it doesn't work, OK, you're doing something else or it does work and that's great. So it's a range of things and then sometimes we've got more time but weekends aren't brilliant for it. We're doing more games and we're doing massaging, we're trying each other up or whatever it is and I can see that's going to go a whole load further but we don't have time to do it ...

Similarly, Anita has never had sex with a man and is not sure she ever will. Thinking through the possibility, she felt she could only do so within a nomadic context.

Anita: Yeah, I mean I couldn't imagine going out and picking up some guy in a straight club or something and ... It would be too weird but I could imagine it happening in an S/M context, for example.

Jamie: And that would be easier than ...

Anita: Yeah, because I think the boundaries seem to be more clearly defined and the whole principles of negotiation tend to be more ... it is

more accepted that you're going to negotiate what's going to happen, whether that's sex or S/M not involving sex ... or whatever.

Jamie: Whereas they would just have an assumption about what sex is?

Anita: Yeah, and what it would mean and that sort of stuff. I can't imagine doing that. Oooohhh. But, yeah, in terms of queer sex, that would be different because in the end it's all an argument about what sex is anyway and all that sort of thing.

Although gendered meanings are heavily embedded in the social construction of sex, from participants' accounts it appears to be possible to produce relational meanings of sex and gender which evade dominant constructions. For Sandra, this was experiencing the powerful erotic possibilities of intensive (and extensive) kissing with a woman as a valued sexual practice. Diane, Erica and Phyllis managed to subvert dominant understandings of heterosexuality through negotiation, exploration and reinterpreting the gendered significance of genitalia. Finally, Anita emphasised how sex within a particular social context emphasising negotiation enables a more local and specific relational construction of what sex is and its significance.

### Constructing Sex through Nomadic Boundaries & Exploration

Focusing on BDSM and renegotiating gendered constructions of sex as nomadic is not to advocate these practices as revolutionary. Indeed, like Glick (2000), I do not believe 'we can fuck our way to freedom'. It is not the particularity of the sexual practices describes that makes them nomadic, but the active questioning of normative constructions of sex, negotiation of boundaries and acceptance of difference. Nor, do individual nomadic practices necessarily change wider social relationships, especially if no one else knows of these practices. So, while individual sexual practices may empower individuals to relate to the world differently, 'politically' it is more important to advocate an anarchist ethic of sexual practice emphasising equality, negotiation and difference and rejecting representation, gendered or otherwise.

### **Conclusions**

Despite the force of sexual state-forms, enacted through violence and shame, participants expressed diverse forms of nomadic creativity. Discontent with compulsory

sexual orientation, compulsory monogamy and formulaic constructions of gender, sexual practice and desire, as well as relationships between them, the participants were actively involved in the ongoing development of identities, relationships and 'sexualities' without borders. Eschewing the rigidity of borders and state-forms, the narratives highlighted in this chapter were produced through negotiation and respect for difference. These stories provide inspiration for a tactical politics of sexuality, where representation is resisted in relationships with others. These micropolitical practices evade the limitations of identity politics and intimate citizenship that depend upon strategic approaches, such as lobbying for rights. In negotiating directly with others, whether showing narratives of sexuality, discussing boundaries for sexual practices with others or exploring relationships between gender and desire, participants expressed autonomy. In the liberal sense of the term, this refers to a rational, masculine individualism, such that Giddens, for example, can write that 'achieving a balance between autonomy and dependence is problematic' (1992: 140). This version of autonomy, of freedom, is more consistent with the 'free market' than with the freedom to choose how we live our lives. Recent feminist efforts to reclaim the concept of autonomy while recognising its inherently relational, rather than 'independent', character (MacKenzie and Stoljar, 2000; Roseneil, 2000) are more appropriate for understanding the narratives in this chapter. A relational understanding of autonomy is also consistent with a history of radical movements developing alternatives to State and Market. This can even be found in the libertarian elements of Marx's work. 'Only in community with others has each individual the means of cultivating his gifts in all directions: only in community, therefore, is personal freedom possible' (Marx and Engels, 1976:86). Commenting on contemporary global anticapitalist movements and the indigenous, anarchist and libertarian Marxist histories that have inspired them, editorial collective Notes from Nowhere write:

Our understanding of autonomy includes community owned and run healthcare, education, and social support; direct democracy in zones liberated by the people living in them -- not as enclaves or places to withdraw to, but as outward looking and connected communities of affinity, engaged in mutual cooperation, collective learning, and unmediated interaction (2003:108-109).

While the practices examined in participants' narratives are not on the scale of healthcare systems, they are nonetheless consistent with the ideals of radical, relational autonomy. Rather than accepting the truths of sex and relationships, they engaged in relationships and networks of affinity, living, learning and loving according to rules they have worked out for themselves.





# Chapter Eight

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## Empowering Resistance

*God bless me I'm a free man  
with no place free to go.*

-- Neko Case, *I wish I was the Moon*

*Freedom is the precondition for acquiring the  
maturity for freedom, not a gift to be granted when  
such maturity is reached.*

-- Immanuel Kant,

*All of us have to learn how to invent our lives,  
make them up, imagine them. We need to be  
taught these skills; we need guides to show us  
how. If we don't, our lives get made up for us by  
other people.*

-- Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Wave in the Mind*

Throughout this thesis I have demonstrated the interrelation of 'sexual orientation' and the ongoing production of hierarchical social order, and, consequently, the importance of anarchist politics for addressing these intertwined social formations. If this is true, then resistance must necessarily be incredibly difficult. Indeed, the techniques of discipline and the authority of the state-form described earlier illustrate the intensity of control surrounding the nexus of gender, emotions, relationships, 'sexuality' and desire which produce 'sexual orientation'. At the same time, I have also documented a remarkable degree of resistance to orientation. While I suggest that subtle forms of resistance to 'sexual orientation' may be found in most contexts where the concept exists, the nomadic expressions described by the participants in this research project seem to be exceptional. What enables these individuals to evade such powerful disciplinary forces upon which the continued existence of so much of our social reality depends?

Developing the capacity for self-determination in resistance to severe sexual policing depends upon a sense of empowerment. Sustained and effective nomadic autonomy depends

upon both an awareness that there are alternatives to sexual rules (i.e., following the rules and staying in the boxes) and an emotional capacity to explore one's desires in spite of sexual state-forms. For the participants in this research, resistance was empowered through development of alternative ways of thinking and a sense of emotional entitlement.

## **Subjugated Knowledges & Emotional Entitlement**

Sexual orientation is an intersection of several aspects of life (e.g., gender practices, sexual desires, emotions and intimate relationships) that are frequently subjected to representation. As the narratives in Chapter Six showed, representations are often based on accepted truths: everyone has a sexual orientation, committed relationships should be monogamous, men and women are naturally different, etc. Despite the pervasive nature of these 'truths', a degree of sexual nomadism is inevitable because people are different and will never entirely conform to any particular sexual regime. This insight is at the core of the poststructuralist micro-politics of resistance. If, as I have argued above, social reality, including subjectivity, the State and even our very bodies, is made up of the diversity effects of competing and interacting discursive productions of truth. While there may be a dominant 'regime of truth' (Foucault, 1980:131) in a given social context in which knowledge is 'produced and transmitted under the control, dominant if not exclusive, of a few great political and economic apparatuses (university, army, writing, media)' (ibid. p132), subjugated forms of knowledge provide possibilities for alternative practices and subjectivities which continuously challenge the stability of claims to unquestionable truth/power. While this micro-politics may link up to form large scale challenges to mainstream truth regimes, such as the US psychological establishment, confronted through Evelyn Hooker's battle over the designation of homosexuality as a form of mental illness or the reclaiming of the label 'queer', those micropolitical effects which go unnoticed at the macro-level of society are just as important (i.e., the personal is political). People involved in mixed relationships live in realities barely conceivable within the dominant terms of sexual orientation as a fixed binary system. For these relationships to survive, the participants must have access to existing subjugated knowledges and also be actively involved producing their own. They are actively involved in producing their own subjectivities, defining their own relationships, acts which must be supported through diverse social networks, relationships and cultural productions which enable them to negotiate social reality on terms other than those set by truth regimes.

As I mentioned earlier, Deleuze and Guattari argue that philosophy should be 'utopian' with the aim to 'summon forth a new earth, a new people' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994:99). Similarly, Foucault wrote,

There are times in life when the question of knowing if one can think differently than one thinks, and perceive differently than one sees, is absolutely necessary if one is to go on looking and reflecting at all. People will say, perhaps, that these games with oneself would be better left backstage; or, at best, that they might properly form part of those preliminary exercises that are forgotten once they have served their purpose. But then, what is philosophy today - philosophical activity, I mean, if it is not the critical work that thought brings to bear on itself? In what does it consist, if not in the endeavour to think differently, instead of legitimating what is already known? (1985:8–9)

For Deleuze, Guattari and Foucault, philosophy was in itself a form of 'political activism' the project of learning that life can be lived differently. With their commitment to decentralised action and a rejection of representation, this notion of philosophy is not one reserved for 'philosophers' but offers a methodology for revolt, a notion that the art of living is one of continuously questioning truth/authority through nomadic creativity. The good life is not an achievement to be savoured after the revolution (or after the PhD or the next promotion, etc.) it is a process without end – a continuous (r)evolution.

Knowledge on its own is not sufficient for this process. It is entirely possible, and arguably a common experience, to realise intellectually that life can be different (in whatever way) without feeling an emotional capacity to find ways to create change. Mark's and Erica's stories both contained key moments that sparked radical change. For Mark, it was the morning-after discussion following his first disastrous attempt to have sex with the man who went on to become his lover.

I was able to say just what I said to you there. 'The reason I slept with you last night or tried to sleep with you was because I thought that's what you wanted and that's why I owed you'. And he said 'no, that's completely ridiculous.' And that's, I suppose, *when I started to believe that people could like me for me* and then I began to look at my sexuality as in, well, if I was prepared to do that maybe I could sleep with him as me. [My emphasis]

Erica's moment began with her decision to become involved with a queer anarchist group.

Erica: It was great. It was just like, yeah, it was nice. I just thought 'oh, I was right all along. I'm OK. I'm normal. I'm fine.' Normal is not about conforming to a norm. Normal as in all *that sort of relaxed feeling that I get when I know that there's nothing wrong with me* -- really nice feelings. Not euphoric feeling, just nice, relaxed, friendly feeling, that it's OK and then I get on with the thing. I can get on with life. [My emphasis]

What characterises these examples, I suggest, is the beginnings of a sense of emotional entitlement. Mark and Erica each had the unusual experience of beginning to feel OK about themselves, to feel that there was nothing wrong with them, to feel worthy of love. Systematic inequalities in the form of social hierarchies are incompatible with any sense of entitlement, as novelist Dorothy Allison explains.

Why are you so afraid? my lovers and friends have asked me the many times I have suddenly seemed a stranger, someone who would not speak to them, would not do the things they believed I should do, simple things like applying for a job, or a grant, or some awards they were sure I could acquire easily. Entitlement, I have told them, is a matter of feeling like we rather than they. You think you have a right to things, a place in the world, and it is so intrinsically a part of you that you cannot imagine people like me, people who seem to live in your world, who don't have it. I have explained by now over and over, in every way I can, but I've never been able to make clear the degree of my fear, the extent to which I feel myself denied: not only that I am queer in a world that hates queers, but that I was born poor into a world that despises the poor (Allison, 1995: 14).

Clearly, being at the bottom of hierarchies -- queer, poor, female, sex worker, sexually abused, etc -- limits all senses of entitlement. If, as I have argued earlier, pathological shame is an intrinsic part of the continued production of hierarchy at all levels, then a strong and stable sense of emotional, rather than capitalist, entitlement (i.e., feeling a right to possessions) is likely to be rarely found in a hierarchical society. Pathological shame, and the rigid conformity it engenders, involves a sense of fear -- fear of not being good enough or of not deserving love. Shame and fear are incompatible with a strong sense of emotional entitlement and, consequently, love (hooks, 2000).

For the participants in this research project, the necessity of subjugated knowledges and a sense of emotional entitlement were supported by a number of factors. People described the importance of access to alternative discourses, participation in times and spaces with different values, and being both challenged and supported in their relationships.

## Alternative Discourse

In order to explore nomadic possibilities, one must realise there is the possibility of life outside the state-form. If accepted truths present borders as fixed, unquestionable and all-encompassing realities, effective resistance is impossible without questioning those truths. In the context of discussing the elements of her S/M-poly-dyke identity, Anita talked about discovering nomadic possibilities.

Anita: I can compromise on a lot of everything for a while or on not being poly for a while but not being a dyke? I've never been attracted to a guy, ever. I've never even had sex with a guy or any sort of sexual anything with a guy and so that was the most difficult for me to imagine changing because that's been the most central for a lot the longest time, I guess. Whereas SM and poly, I didn't really know they existed until I was maybe 24, 25, I guess. Whereas I did at least know that lesbians existed, well, only just. There weren't out lesbians back in the 80's when I was at High school. [...] I was brought up in [...] a fairly small sort of town. I was very naïve and very young and all I knew was that I wasn't particularly interested in boys and I thought 'OK, not interested in boys. I'm a geek'. I always hung out with the geeks; they didn't have boyfriends or anything so it didn't really become an issue until I heard about lesbianism. Then I realised that there were lesbians and I thought 'Ohhh'.

Jamie: That explains a lot.

Anita: It's good now though, isn't it? I mean people coming out now, they have ... they've out lesbians and out gay men in the media, you know, everywhere you look [...] How old are you?

Jamie: 28.

Anita: 28 years, yes, about the same age. Back in the 80's, I don't know what it was like when you were growing up, but there was nothing like that in the media. No images or anything. So ... if you were a sheltered girl, growing up in your own middle-class white family ...

Jamie: Yeah, and definitely no poly/SM dykes.

Anita: Exactly. And no models of poly relationships either. I mean did you know anybody that wasn't in a monogamous couple or single wanting to be in a monogamous couple? There's nobody out there that's going 'look, you don't need necessarily have to be in a monogamous couple'. So the thought never really occurred to me.

Jamie: Well if you can't imagine it you can't do it.

Anita: Exactly. You don't know that there's another way of living.

The power of dominant knowledge regimes is clear in Anita's narrative. The only alternative to heteronormativity in her smalltown high school was being a 'geek', which clearly inhibited her capacity to explore and develop her potential desires. Fortunately for Anita, she discovered more options later in life. Kev discovered his alternatives reading science-fiction at an early age. He recalled one memorable story.

Yeah, well, when I was a kid, I only used to read science fiction. That was a big thing. And I think what I like about science fiction is it questions a lot of stuff that you wouldn't normally question including stuff about sex and sexual identity and one thing I remember is ... I don't know how old I was. I must have been about 10 or 11 or something [...] and at one point there's these two people working in a ... it's like a medical lab and they had all-over isolation suits on and they were just two lab assistants who were attracted to each other and one of them said ... and they couldn't see each other. All they could tell from each other was their voices and their approximate height, but one of them said to the other 'do you fancy going getting some food or something afterwards?' And the other one said 'yeah, and maybe ...' and suggested [...] 7 hours of ecstasy I think they called it or something, and the social norm means you want to spend the night together, no questions asked, no relationship required, just we seem to be getting on. And the other one went 'oh, yeah, that sounds really cool. Yeah, we seem compatible' And they're going out and as they get changed one says 'by the way, are you male or female?' [...] 'Does it really matter?' And the guy's went 'oh, no. I was just interested.' And that was the first time I remember thinking, oh, there are other people think sort of like I'm thinking and it was really cool. But I think that sticks out so much. It was obviously a formative moment in my childhood.

This 'formative moment', remembered so clearly, was intellectually and emotionally important. For Sandra, her childhood discovery of women's music let her know that heterosexuality was not the only option.

Well when I was about 12 ... I heard my first women's music. Women loving women and blah, blah, blah, collective groups from [an 'alternative' urban area] making a record and stuff like that and got really much into that and sort of listening to [university] gay radio shows. ... I used to listen to that every week.

Having had, or having been denied, access to an awareness of diverse sexual possibilities while growing up was very important for these participants. The strength of contemporary constructions of childhood in much of the over-developed world make it unlikely that mainstream non-judgmental and realistic information about diverse sexual practices and

relationships will be available to young people. Alternative discourse (e.g. queer, feminist and/or anarchist) is important in enabling (young) people to feel comfortable exploring their desires.

Of course, as Beth pointed out, mainstream media can also have positive impact.

I think when people talk about sex, it can throw up stuff that they didn't know about and people learn more about each other. The thing that I'm thinking about is *Sex in the City* and they talk a lot about the mechanics of sex and stuff that happens or whatever. I was reading something in the paper 'why are men so upset by *Sex in the City*?' My partner isn't. He just sits and watches it as well. I think that that is almost political because it's kind of ... it makes a shared awareness of things that people don't talk about on their own and I think that's quite powerful because if it's something like ... I don't know ... say like if they were talking about female ejaculation; say someone's sitting in the house and thinking that they're the only person that's ever done that and they think it's weird or whatever, it changes things for them to know that it's among loads of people and it's a reality check as well. You can sort of check your attitudes against other people's.

A shared awareness of female ejaculation and other sexual possibilities explored in *Sex in the City* is valuable, especially if it stimulates discussion. At the same time *Sex in the City* represents a life impossible for most women -- near-complete financial security, a high degree of sexual autonomy, and idealised (mostly white). Clearly, a given example of media may simultaneously challenge certain accepted truths while maintaining others. Transgression, up to a point, sells.

Other participants discussed the importance of learning about alternative ways of thinking about sexuality. Douglas described his pleasure at hearing about alternatives to fitting within identity categories.

I mean everybody else sticks their hand up and says 'I'm this. I'm that. I'm this one and I've got friends over there and they're all shouting for this.' That would be wonderful. [...] But also ... you know, when I heard [an activist-academic] speak that day at that conference, that was the first time that I'd heard somebody in a gay arena actually speak for individuality. It just ... I couldn't believe it. I couldn't believe it. It really ... I thought, my God! Can this be true?

Douglas was almost at a loss for words in describing how important it was for him to hear

that there can be no correct way to be gay. Eva, like many other participants, talked about the importance of reading alternative material.

The magazines that I read are feminist magazines from the States mainly, which are not specifically queer but at least they're queer-friendly and inclusive. But I do read a lot of books that are feminist and/or queer.

Finally, Laurence experienced a great deal of anxiety about sex and romantic relationships when he was younger, so much that he chose to avoid them. Here he describes the value of a discourse of alternative sexual possibility, that of feeling comfortable not having sex.

Anyway the point was that I got a couple of Buddhist<sup>12</sup> books and they sort of didn't make me think 'ah, yes, this is definitely the way'. There were aspects and elements to it as there are aspects and elements to all religions that are interesting, the bit that seemed to make sense was that desire effectively ... when ... certainly in the case of desire that you can't necessarily have .. in terms of it's great to go 'I'd love to have a cup of tea' and then *have* a cup of tea, because that sort of fulfilment is achieved but to say 'I'd love to be with somebody beautiful and do all these amazing things. Oh, but, wait a minute, I can't. Oh.' Instead, that's going to kind of make you feel down. That seemed to make perfect sense to me and the idea of trying not to dwell too much on something at that particular time I couldn't have.

Each of these examples challenges accepted truths (e.g. that only men can ejaculate, that sexual desire must be based on gender, that people of a certain age should be having sex), potentially providing people intellectual and emotional resources for creating nomadic spaces outside the logic of the state-form. Alternative discourses may also provide a sense of emotional support for those alienated by accepted truths.

## Time and Space

Accepted truths, and their implications for emotional entitlement, can also be challenged through alternative ways of experiencing 'reality' in particular locations in time and space. Mobility in time and space allowed for motion in participants' identities<sup>13</sup>. For example, participants recognise a link between the passage of time and changing attitudes toward

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12 On the anarchism of Buddhism, see Edwards, 1998.

13 I thank Mary Holmes from the University of Aberdeen for comments that encouraged me to explore this connection.



sexuality. In particular, Alasdair, who was the oldest participant, described the importance of these changes for his own emotional well-being.

I've been more comfortable with the concept of being bisexual. I think a lot of the guilt has gone. Social attitudes to homosexuality and bisexuality have changed tremendously. There's still a lot of prejudice. People are much more open about it generally. [Where I volunteer,] I don't tell people I'm bisexual but there is a degree of openness when you're talking to people about their sexuality all the time but people don't generally talk about their own sexuality. It's all a very healthy attitude.

Others chose to move in space. None of the participants lived in the area in which they had grown up, and six of the 16 had moved to the UK from other lands. It is difficult to say why such a high proportion of people in the study are non-native. This may be due in part to a common British reticence to speak openly about sex and relationships with strangers. Another explanation may be the value of moving in enabling changes in identity. Indeed, research on lesbian and gay identity suggests that moving to new locations, particularly cities<sup>14</sup>, supports this argument (e.g., Weston, 1998). Kev described the benefits of an urban environment.

You see most of the time I don't think about being with a male partner as being anything out of the ordinary at all. It's only when someone specifically says and then you think 'oh, I suppose that is quite unusual for some people'. I suppose being in a city it is fairly accommodating or tolerant or whatever you want to call it. It's much easier than if you went away to a much more provincial place, I suppose you'd feel it a lot more. But unless people specifically make you feel uncomfortable then you don't tend to think about it that much or I don't anyway.

Nomadism, as conceptual space, may also be linked to movement through socio-physical space.

Some participants also talked about the pleasures of nomadic spaces, whether they be predominately anarchist or simply more fluid than the rigidly policed spaces of everyday life. Sandra described two examples: in the first she talks about why she values women-only space, and in the second contrasts non-heterosexual and queer spaces (a bisexual convention and gay bars) to a wedding.

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14 Anarchist commentators have also noted the liberatory potential of urban life (The Curious George Brigade, 2003).

I'm not sure if I could put it into words but it's like they're not here and we're not talking about them generally and they're not going to come in. It's like ... it's a hierarchy power thing, you know, that guys get ... guys have more power generally. A guy can be a jerk and get away with more than a woman can, being a jerk. A guy can be fat and not called 'fat'. Whereas a woman can be fat and people will go up to her and say 'shouldn't you lose some weight?' See, I used to be a fat kid and had people coming up to me going 'do you really think you should be eating that?' It's like 'you have no idea what I've eaten today. This might be the only thing I've eaten in 3 days. Who are you to comment on it?' I don't think guys get that the way women do. So it's kind of nice not having them around sometimes. [...] I'm not a separatist, as we have established. Guys are all right. They've got their different views. Not all of them are jerks. Not all of them are the guy who had the pornography when I was a kid. Teenage boys I do have issues with [...] especially loud ones. Why do guys have to yell when they go down the street in a group of 2 or 3? Now I know that not every group of guys who goes down the street in 2's and 3's is yelling. It's obviously those are the ones you're going to notice the most. But yet, the impact is very large for some of us. So it's nice, the idea of not having some guy who's going to be yelling down the street. It's like 'give us a break for a while. Just a little refuge.' You go home to have your quiet time. You want to go into your woman's space to have some quiet time or to have some female time or whatever. And if it's a gay space, then that's even better because you don't even have to deal with so much with people perpetuating stereotypes of what women should be. Of course you do have the peer pressure in the lesbian community and stuff, which is crazy but not to such an extent ... and as you get older, as I get older, I feel quite happy in rebellion. Like not going along with folk if I don't want to kind of thing and hopefully pointing out to somebody else who doesn't feel quite so confident about that, that it's OK not to like whatever it is that's the trendy thing just now.

I've got mixed feelings about it because I don't necessarily want to go to a place where all the people are talking about is whether they're bisexual or not. It gets a bit tedious, I think. It's nice to be able to be who you are but people go to these things ... a lot of people have their own agendas like they want to sleep with as many people as possible or party or work out all their neuroses or just talk about sexuality all the time or whatever. So I can see it being a bit tedious but at the same time it's kind of nice to be able to be who you are and know that the rules are you're not allowed to get at anybody. [...] [B]eing able to dance with anybody and be who you are is kind of nifty. I've got a photograph of me and my partner at a wedding ... it's the old wedding thing, isn't it? And I've got on my skirt and my suit, whatever and it's me dipping<sup>15</sup> him on the dance floor and these other couples kind of looking at us in shock. The photograph is great because you can see the looks from the other people and it's like ... and my partner didn't mind to be dipped. He doesn't mind being the girl, so to speak. But all these people were like 'whoa!' So I kind of like being able to

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15 North American term for a dance manoeuvre in which, traditionally, a man embraces a woman while lowering her sideways toward the ground. Over her, he often then kisses her.

get up and have a bop and not have the rules and you can do that in a gay bar and you can do that at the bisexual conference disco fun night whatever.

In both of these spaces, Sandra felt less afraid, less policed in terms of gender performance. While each had their downfall ('lesbian police' or 'tedious bisexuals'), they nonetheless seemed to provide her with a sense of freedom. Sandra felt entitled to evade stereotypes of what women should be, oppressive masculine behaviour, and gendered representations of dancing. This sense of entitlement was then reinforced by experiencing environments in which this sense of entitlement was validated.

Similarly, when I asked Erica when she felt particularly comfortable or happy with her sexuality, she also described a queer space. This was at an anarchist-organised event for 'queers of all sexualities' in a transformed squatted building.

Yeah, I remember being at the sex party and just being so happy because my lover was there somewhere and I was doing my thing and I knew he was doing his thing and then we got together at some time in the morning and I just thought 'oh, this is so blissful'. We were both so thinking ... I felt 'this is OK. This is like just being ourselves and being together' and we hadn't had a dirty look from anybody.

Like Sandra, this nomadic space contrasts sharply with her experiences of policing on the gay scene. Unlike Sandra, Erica never found a gay bar to be a place with fewer rules. Perhaps few, if any, spaces are entirely nomadic, as this would depend upon all of the participants in the space having a capacity for freedom that could not be developed in the world as it is currently produced. Furthermore, different people will find different spaces more liberating than others. Thus, there is no perfect nomadic space.

Indeed, Phyllis described the benefits of spaces that were much more nomadic than institutionalised spaces she had left behind. At the very end of the interview, I asked if there was anything else that she felt was important to include. She responded by describing connection between sexuality and spirituality in her life.

I think it's something that's relevant to me and where ... well, golly, my whole life really, about being ... trying to be all these nice things and accepting and therefore I've tried to fit into institutions that have acted in the same way as well. So like the Quaker, voluntary sector, the kind of

[professional area] that I'm doing is about helping people who've got quite serious problems because of the institutions they're put in. So I suppose that whole thing is about dealing with that and understanding that you can find institutions just completely wrong for you and they just hem you in and just want nothing to do with you. That happened to me with the Church of England. I can't cope with this at all. Get rid of it. And then very many years later, you find something that just about you can cope with in that direction.

While hardly describing a complete sense of freedom, particularly in the last line, Phyllis has been comforted by participating in spiritual and work spaces that allow a great deal more flexibility than most. Phyllis theorised a link between her capacity to feel comfortable with the fluidity of her own sexual desires and finding spiritual and work spaces where she could be (relatively) comfortable. Rather than seeing the nomadic as something only found in alternative ghettos, participants stories suggest that this 'outside' of the State is also found within everyday life.

## Relationships

Relationships themselves also served as a source for enabling nomadic change. Those that incorporated elements of consciousness-raising, mutual aid, and a communicative ethic were both challenging and supportive. This combination was crucial for empowerment.

Several participants described important aspects of their relationships that can be understood as consciousness raising. Exposure to different identities, experiences and politics encouraged them to see reality in new ways. Douglas and Pete described increasing empathy and awareness for people with different sexual orientation identities. For Douglas, this developed from living a largely 'heterosexual' life, while Pete credited his 'queer' partner for opening his eyes.

Douglas: I think the other thing that I've learnt over the years is that so-called heterosexual people have a bloody hard time of it as well. I used to think heterosexual people had such an easy time of it and of course that's just not true. And that's made it a lot easier. I think I'd a lot of envy at the beginning, a lot of envy about something that I'd missed and deprived of and missed out on that was my birthright and should have had and it's been a lot easier ... knowing that their lot isn't straightforward either.

Pete: I think ... because I saw the views from ... say, gay people and

lesbian people, what they have to go through. Also bisexual because actually, bisexual have sometimes the problems ... I just learned that nobody really knows about them. They don't get accepted as something real because you have to be either on one side or the other so that there's a real issue and there's real problems. I also saw the inequality in all these things. I just got aware of these things and I really ... definitely profited. I got more tolerant and I got ... yeah, I profited, definitely.

For Kev, his partner's perspective encouraged him to question identity more generally. This came up when I asked Kev if he felt the differences in identity between himself and his partner had an effect on his attraction toward him. Kev responded:

I suppose that's one thing that was attractive, was that, when I first met him, he was someone who actually questioned identity and talked about it and thought, whereas other people were just ... that's how they were. Although I wouldn't necessarily have thought about it if I hadn't met him, it's ... the fact that he's thinking about it and talked about it and has such a strong view on it, is, in itself, quite interesting in fact so I suppose that makes a difference.

The frequent tactic of LGBT identity politics in promoting coming out is based on a principle that we can see working here. People are more likely to question particular 'truths' if they can empathise with others and see things from another perspective. However, as I have argued earlier, this approach assumes that it is 'LGBT people' who have an obligation to explain their reality to the heterosexual majority. In these examples, the realities of 'sexual orientation' are explored from a variety of angles, challenging the binary logic of sexual state-forms.

## Supportive relationships

As well as being challenged in relationships, participants also talked about the importance of feeling supported. Supportive relationships included friends, partners and family members. Meg and Sandra described the comforts of spending time with people with whom they felt they shared common ground.

Meg: I really value a circle of queer activist friends where I feel ... I mean generally amongst activists I feel fine about my sexuality but it's especially mighty fine amongst people where you feel like there's a sexuality and a politics overlap.

Sandra: I find it valuable, having an alternative, having women talk,

whether it's moaning about your partner ... with the full understanding that you love your partner and that it's just having a moan because sometimes you just want to say '(sigh).' I don't know. I find it valuable to have that and to be able to ask them questions and ... I don't know. I think because I value same sex, same gender, whatever you want to call it, relationships and find them closer generally.

As well as groups of people who provided comfort and emotional support, participants also described examples from individual relationships. Douglas emphasised the strength of the emotional bond he shares with his wife in the context of their nonmonogamy.

I think that's one of the reasons why we're together, is that she really does accept me as an individual [...] and she doesn't ... really ask me to be anything else. She doesn't want me to leave her and I don't want to leave her but I need to live the rest of my life as well and I've been very straightforward about that and she's very straightforward that that's OK with her

It was reassuring for her always to meet the men that I was close to because she liked them. She liked them. She enjoyed them. She realised this wasn't some horrific thing that was ... that was OK. If she met someone that she could relax physically with who happened to be a woman, who was totally accepted with me, that would be fine too. Or men. But we do ... the thing is that we do have a very strong loyalty to each other, that's very emotional. We would cross bridges to sort things out for each other.

Finally, Sandra and Diane described elements of support for sexual nomadism within their largely conventional families despite certain silences around sexuality.

Sandra: I asked my aunt, his sister, [about my uncle] and she said 'well, he is [gay] but we don't generally talk about it.' And I think that's basically their attitude. [...] And when I took up with my present partner, my aunt ... we went to see ... to visit my aunt and uncle, a different uncle, and she took me into the kitchen and she said 'are you sure? Are you all right? Is everything OK? You don't have to do this you know.' Like worried that maybe I was feeling the need to conform to some social pressure and I said 'it's all right.'

Diane: Sometimes its more than my Mum and Dad will know about but they're just quite private. I might sort of volunteer relationship information because it's in mind or it's going on or I want to update them on what's going on in my life. But I don't think it's because of the sexuality side of it. I think its just because its more than they would know generally, than about anybody else's sex life or love life or whatever. Well that's the

impression I get from ... 'that's fine. It's your own business. As long as you're happy' kind of thing, but they are quite ... they are very respectful and they engage with me for the person that I am.

It would be especially difficult to imagine supportive mixed relationships without a fluid understanding of identity and an effort to recognise the complexities of the other(s). Otherwise it becomes almost a joke -- did you hear about *the lesbian* who was dating a *straight boy*? Even the most rigid familial relationships described above, with their awkward silences, include respect for difference and an openness to change. Sandra's aunt didn't say, I know you're a lesbian so why are you doing this? She asked if Sandra was ok. This is also an example of a communicative ethic, the third element empowering resistance in participants' narratives.

### Communicative ethic

Sexual nomadism depends upon a commitment to communication and an openness to difference within relationships, a fluid solidarity. Douglas talked about the necessity and difficulties of fluid communication and the ideal of being completely open.

Douglas: It's not a very fair way to go into a relationship with anyone saying it's all right as long as I never get ... any real feelings for you, you know. You know, that's just ... it's all right out there, thank you. That's great. And for a lot of people, that *is* great but, you know, things happen in relationships and relationships change and you can be constantly surprised. And I'm in a kind of relationship with somebody at the minute and it's ... it's a caretaking relationship. I do most of the caring and he does most of the receiving and it was sexual for about 3 weeks and now it is just very companionable and I miss him when he's not there but I'm not tormented and I think he gets what he needs out of it and I get what I need out of it and that's ... and we were both free to admire or to be with somebody else, in theory. [LAUGHS] In theory. Oh, God, what a life!

Jamie: It's complicated, isn't it?

Douglas: It's the way we are. Does that help the kind of broad picture?

Jamie: Yeah, yeah. You say you felt dishonest but are you upfront about how you feel?

Douglas: Yeah, oh, yeah.

Jamie: So you're honest about it.

Douglas: Yeah, but you know, even being honest at the beginning of a relationship, you think you're being honest. You know, it's like this. You say 'right, this is the history. This is where I think I'm coming from.' But you know, you change and things ... everything's open so that it's never ... you can't clear the decks one day and say 'that's it done'. You know, you have to keep on ...

Jamie: But does that sound dishonest?

Douglas: Em ... maybe it's being dishonest with me in the sense that *I know that you can't legislate in relationships*. You can't ... I know that so why do it? Why pretend? I can say that's where I am and it's not a particularly wise place to be but it's where I am at the minute. That's ... I suppose why I don't think I'm very proud of it. I don't think I've been very ... I think I could explain it a wee better than that actually but I don't know how. I don't know how. [My emphasis]

Jamie: What would be better?

Douglas: What would be better? To say 'my heart is open. I will welcome any relationship that challenges me and that is safe.' I suppose that would be better.

Jamie: But you don't feel that you could say that?

Douglas: No, I think I'm a bit more guarded than that. A bit more guarded than that.

Jamie: And you see that as a personal fault?

Douglas: I feel a bit sad about it. I feel a bit ... and then I think 'who else does?' Do other people do that? I don't know.

Douglas is asking some very difficult questions. What does honesty mean when life is in constant flux? Why does he feel drawn simultaneously to the rigid, State-like logic of legislating in relationships at the same time as he wants to feel that his heart is open? The risk of intimacy is that it depends upon vulnerability. In a hierarchical society, where problems are blamed on individuals, defensiveness is necessary for survival; paradoxically, so is intimacy. Thus, Douglas is torn between his desire for control, which surfaced throughout the interview, and his desire for fluidity. Although he is open about this, his nomadic feelings do not live up to his ideal of honest communication.

In other examples, nomadism is not so much a difficult ideal, nor a



frightening difference, but an admirable characteristic. Kev talked about the support for emotional entitlement he gained from communicating about his sexual experience and non-monogamous relationship with his friends and communicating about sexual appreciation of others with his partner.

Jamie: Can you think of any examples where you have felt especially happy or comfortable about your sexuality?

Kev: Just sometimes, when you're with friends who are open-minded but very sort of much straight and normal and they're asking about stuff and you're almost like an expert. You're expounding on your experiences, which go far beyond theirs and they're kind of 'ooh, that's really weird and that's quite interesting' and that's kind of cool. But it doesn't happen that often. [...]

Jamie: Aside from when people are scandalised that you can look at other people and your partner doesn't mind or your partner does it as well, how does it feel doing that checking people out together?

Kev: It depends on the mood. I mean if you're feeling really insecure, then it probably wouldn't be a good idea but normally, yeah, it's fun. It means you can express something that you'd be feeling anyway but you don't have to pretend you're not looking or pretend you're not thinking that. It's much more fun just being able to say 'wow! Look at that' or 'he's gorgeous' or 'she's got wonderful eyes' or 'look at his package' or something like that. It's fun and it feels more honest [...]. I suppose some people actually are scandalised but I'm sure a lot of people really are jealous. I have had friends say to me that it's so cool that you can do that. [...] there's still an element of having it validated by other people so if other people keep telling you how cool your relationship is, yeah, you take it on board. It's good. [...]

For Kev, communication both within the partnership and with other friends has been important for him to feel happy with his nomadic practices.

While feelings about openly communicating about sexual desires for others ranged from discomfort to intense pleasure, all of the participants felt it was important to be able to talk openly about sex and sexuality. For some, developing this ability has been an important change in their lives. Douglas and Alasdair were the two oldest participants, and had consequently grown up when same-sex desire was heavily sanctioned.

Jamie: [H]ow do you feel about talking about your sexuality with me now?

Alasdair: I'm quite relaxed about it. As I said a moment ago, I would have found it very difficult even 30 years ago, which is before I met my wife. It's something that, once you've told somebody the terrible secret, the next time it's quite a bit easier and so on.

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Jamie: Who do you talk to about emotions and sexuality and all this kind of stuff?

Douglas: I've spent a lot of my life in therapy. There's been a ... that's sort of been taken care of. I hadn't [communicated about sex and emotions] with friends until probably the last 3 or 4 years and it's been a great relief to be able to do it with friends. It's nice. And we laugh ... we laugh at the ... there's a comedy about it as well. There's being allowed to make mistakes. That was the thing that I was never allowed to do. I always had to be in charge, always justify my existence, looking after [my brother], being an adult and making up for all the mess I've caused everybody. That's still a big load with me, that I have to justify being in pursuit of something.

Both Alasdair and Douglas described very constraining conditions, of having a terrible secret or never being allowed to make mistakes. At the same time, for both of them being able to talk has helped them to resist constraints more effectively and to enjoy life, to laugh.

Being able to talk openly and comfortably about sex is also affected by gender. When femininity is associated with a desire for romance rather than sex, and masculinity involves a fear of emotional intimacy, sexual communication becomes very difficult. Melissa talked about her partner being exceptional in this regard.

He is really good at analysing emotions and talking about them, which is not something that I have found in boyfriends.

Meanwhile, Anita found that experience in S/M has helped mitigate her gender training, at least within that context.

Jamie: Now to feelings about sexuality. Can you think of any examples where you felt embarrassed, guilty or ashamed about something to do with sex?

Anita: Embarrassed, guilty or ashamed about something to do with sex. I feel embarrassed quite easily about it but I think that a lot of that is [that] anybody but particularly girls are not supposed to talk about sex. So I think everybody has that thing about talking about sex that they find it

quite embarrassing and ... regardless of whether you're straight or gay or into SM or what. I've found that since I've been into SM, [...] talking about sex has got a lot easier because I've got more used to negotiating scenes with people that I don't know. And the first time somebody asked me 'what are you into?' I was like ... 'what? You want me to say what I'm into, in public, in words? No! I would be too embarrassed and I would never say such terrible things like that.' But now I'm like, 'oh, well, I'm into blah, blah, blah. What are you into? Oh, OK ' So ...and that's it. I can talk ... I can negotiate a scene [...] quite openly without feeling particularly embarrassed but at the same time, I can still feel a little bit guilty or embarrassed when I'm talking to my vanilla girlfriend about the stuff that I do, which is completely outside her experience, like piercing for example, and I can feel ... I wouldn't necessarily ask her to do stuff because I'm very ... I'm trying very hard to not push into doing anything, which she would consider to be outside the boundaries of vanilla sex. So I'd probably, in fact, err on the side of not asking her to do anything

Jamie: So it's easier to negotiate in an SM context but suddenly in this different kind of context it becomes harder then?

Anita: Absolutely because in another context you don't ... it's not taken for granted that you will talk about it, but in an SM context it is taken for granted that you will discuss specifics before you do anything. You will say 'I'm not into penetration' or 'I really like big dildoes' and 'I like being spanked' and 'I like this but I don't like this' or whatever. Whereas somehow you are expected to know what you like doing if you're in a vanilla context and so you won't talk about details. [...] I don't know. Maybe people that are just into vanilla do talk about it. I've never been with anybody vanilla that does talk about the specifics of sex like 'I really like blah, blah, blah'. Maybe that's just the girlfriend. Girls have to get into mind reading.

While I have emphasised respect for boundaries as an important aspect of nomadic freedom, Anita's excessive fear of crossing boundaries with her girlfriend seems to have more in common with pathological shame. While the communicative ethic of the S/M scene has been very empowering for Anita, it has not allowed her to completely overcome this shame. The good girls/bad girls division, which must be one source of shame surrounding women and S/M, also inhibits communication with her 'vanilla' (non-S/M) lover about sex in general.

Meanwhile, Phyllis and Eva described how their relationships were the most sexually open and comfortable that they had ever experienced. Communication enabled both of them to explore sexual practices and desires that they may not have felt capable of or entitled to before.

Phyllis: ... he will just talk about anything with me. I haven't met men who have done that, straight men who have done that so he's quite a miracle really. No, it's ... and he'll do anything as well. 'I'll buy you a toy'. I was like 'toy? Help!' I've just never done anything like that before so, for me, that is really freeing because I've got all stuff going on in your head, which you never let out anywhere then suddenly somebody who is on the same wavelength ... It's very weird. So even in my gay relationships with women, I've never been close on that level. I mean somehow physically it's been really good but the mental thing hasn't gone and developed it and I suppose you have that famous lesbian bed-death<sup>16</sup> thing that happens, which now I might be able to unlock, having had this relationship with him but then I had no idea how to unlock it and I just didn't know what was going on [...] because you're not developing or doing anything new.

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Eva: Yeah, I mean we can kind of ... we can talk about things like the idea of introducing somebody else into the mix and stuff like that. It's cool. He can even humour me talking about ideas of like him with another boy and stuff so I appreciate that he can deal with that even though he wouldn't really do it, I'm sure. So yeah, it does get mentioned, stuff like me and another girl and things like that. But I don't think it's a huge part of it. But we do watch porn together and it's kind of nice that we can both be attracted to the same person in it and stuff.

Jamie: What happens when if you watch porn together? Do you talk about it? What's it like, watching porn together?

Eva: Well we're still quite beginners at watching porn. We haven't watched too much of it. We were watching something the other night and he made a comment, sort of indicating that he liked this particular woman in it and I was like 'oh, cool, I like her as well. She's my favourite because the rest are a bit crap' or whatever but ... yeah. I don't know. I'd like to find better porn. I'd like to find stuff like ... you know, videos that have been made by the staff at 'Good Vibrations' and stuff like that would be good, but we're trying.

Jamie: Do you talk about porn then?

Eva: Yeah.

Jamie: So what are the discussions like?

Eva: It's cool. Not just the porn but other things that we do and whatever ... it's been the best sexual relationship I've had, I would say, and a lot of that is just being able to feel comfortable enough with someone to say what you'd really like and to learn to actually talk about these things instead of be really embarrassed and not able to say it. So that's really good. He says that I'm very free and that it's been good for him because it's

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16 Where women in long term relationships stop having sex but remain companionate partners.

been ... he didn't have anything like this before and he wasn't able to explore his desires like this before.

In both of these cases, the descriptions of sexual communication have been the opposite of pathological shame. Rather than being bound to conformity, Eva, Phyllis and their boyfriends have felt able to explore and play. Sexual fantasies were no longer 'stuff going on in your head, which you never let out' or too embarrassing to say, but erotic landscapes without borders for these nomadic explorers.

## **Conclusions: (Anarchist) Practice**

Resistance to state-forms, sexual or otherwise, is empowered by practice. I further suggest that empowerment is more compatible with anarchist practice than with hierarchical relationships. If who we are is a product of our social practices, then anarchist practice supports the development of anarchist subjectivities, also understood as the transitional process of becoming-nomads (Call, 2002). Such practice, at its most basic level, can be as simple as beginning to understand that reality is not fixed with the help of a science-fiction novel, television programme or music. Anarchist practice begins with imagination. While imagining alternatives is very important, participation is necessary for developing senses of empowerment and of entitlement.

So what has enabled these participants to resist sexual state-forms? In a sense, the answer is resistance itself. As Carole Pateman points out, 'participation develops and fosters the very qualities necessary for it; the more individuals participate the better able they become to do so' (1970:42-43). The division of resistance and empowerment, then, is somewhat false. The nomadic autonomy described in the previous chapter -- people defining for themselves notions of sexual identity, how to construct their relationships, and even how to understand 'sex' -- is radically empowering. It is an experience of feeling powerful through co-operation and self-management (i.e., power-to) rather than domination and representation (i.e., power-over). Environmental activist and scholar Alex Begg argues for just such a radical interpretation of empowerment.

Power-to must involve participation, but not any kind of participation: it is only when it is active and constructive that it meets needs effectively. Empowerment is a process of self-organisation and self-realisation -- a

process, because it is passed on through co-operation between different empowered agents. Through co-operation, we can build whole empowered societies (2000:141).

But, if it is resistance that enables resistance, from where does resistance originate? Anarchist theory, from Kropotkin to Deleuze and Foucault, insists that resistance to domination is integral to human existence. For Kropotkin, mutual aid has been, and continues to be, a significant factor throughout human biological and social evolution. The state-form cannot exist without the nomad. Could any form of social relation so efficiently reduce all of human diversity to carefully managed, controlled and represented categories as to eliminate the nomad? Foucault states that 'as soon as there is a power relation, there is a possibility of resistance' (1988b:123). Life too diverse to be contained and will always overflow borders. This resistance is also then utilised by the State in order to justify the policing actions which are the basis of its existence. For, how would people be so thoroughly controlled without the threat of the outcast, the outlaw, the outsider? Thus argue Deleuze and Guattari, 'the State itself has always been in a relation with an outside and is inconceivable independent of that relationship' (1988: 360). Finally, just as capitalist economy depends upon the unpaid labour of the 'private sphere', so too does the State depend upon a high degree of self-organisation. Naming 'the market' as the basis of our economic life depends on not acknowledging the importance of economic relations outwith the market, and thus possibilities of economics without markets. So too does crediting the State with creating social order depend upon a denial of how anarchic characteristics of everyday relationships (e.g., empathy and co-operation) are central to human sociability and, therefore, human societies, hierarchical or otherwise.

Not only is a degree of anarchy (resistance, empowerment, power-to, nomadism, autonomy, self-organisation, mutual aid, creativity) necessary for human social being, but it is a commonly held contemporary ideal of intimate relationships. The Situationists suggested a connection between love and anarchy. 'Love is inseparable from individual realisation, and from communication between individuals (opportunities for meetings) and from genuine and enthusiastic participation in a shared plan. It is inseparable from the struggle for universal self-management' (Vaneigem, 2000). It is no coincidence, then, that empowering resistance to sexual orientation looks very much like any other form of direct action, the anarchist alternative to representationalist politics (e.g. lobbying authorities or working within

hierarchical organisations). One major form of direct action is the promotion of alternative discourses through publication of books, magazines, web sites, leaflets, graffiti, stickers, film, etc which aim to remind people that domination is not necessary and that they are capable of doing something about it. The other is the practice of organising without hierarchy to achieve collective aims. This example from a history of the recent ecological direct action movement in Britain is telling.

The first real flashpoint came at a chestnut tree on George Green, common land in the heart of the Wanstead. The 10ft hoardings which had been erected to enclose the common were trashed by a jolly mob of kids, activists and local people. On the Green a hunched woman in her 80s was crying. She had always felt powerless, but when she pushed the fences down with hundreds of others, she said she felt powerful for the first time in her life. Empowerment is direct action's magic, and the spell was spreading (Anonymous, 2003:14).

Like Mark realising that he could be liked for himself and not just for sex, this woman wept because she realised she was entitled to feel powerful. Direct action both depends upon and encourages a sense of entitlement (For more on emotional transformations experienced by people in direct action activism, see e.g., Seel, 1998 and Roseneil, 2000). With its emphasis on empowerment, direct action is consistent with the anarchist ethics of the inseparability of ends and means. This prefigurative action aims not only to resist specific relations of domination, but to enable people to develop the skills necessary for egalitarian, participatory and libertarian political systems (Franks, 2003).

Direct action also is often taken by people working in affinity groups -- small collectives based on trust and shared aims. Researching affinity groups in the context of globalisation conflicts, Kevin McDonald (2002) argues that relationships within these forms of organisation are friend-like, unlike those in authoritarian groups.

The affinity groups represents an inversion of the older model of social movement that we see most clearly associated with the labour movement, one where the group acts through the person. In the case of the affinity group, the person discovers him/herself and acts through the group. The basis of the affinity group is the friend-like relationship, activists constantly referring to the importance of each person in the group being able to trust others, and be confident that the others will be there for them. The mode of acting is one of personal responsibility, for oneself and for others [...] This is a mode of action that above all aims at recognising the other as a partner, as an actor who is personal as well as social. It is

critical, therefore, that involvement is experienced as personal, as opposed to acting out one's role as a member of a group or association. Hence the constant reference to acting with friends in affinity groups -- people who know you, people you can trust. Friendship relationships recognise us in our singularity, and friendships must be reciprocal -- we cannot recognise the other as a friend with if they do not recognise us as a friend. The mode of interaction among friends is fluid -- characterised by loose boundaries, uncertain structure, talking at once, even embodied suppleness where physical interaction is fluid. With friends we act as persons, not citizens, nor as workers or in terms of some other community identity (pp 116-117).

These anarchist forms of organisation challenge the divisions of personal/political and public/private. Fundamentally, anarchist politics can be understood as arguing that the ideal of friendship can be applied to all forms of organisation, not just 'personal' relationships. This is not to say that activists are so naive as to believe that everyone can be friends with everyone else. Rather, that macro level organisation can be achieved based on networks of affinity groups -- this is how the WTO meeting in Seattle was shut down. Alternatively, macro level organisation can also be achieved in larger groups based on the values of friendship: recognition of individuals, fluid forms of organisation, open communication, negotiation, and loose boundaries.

Finally, anarchism rejects the possibility of unquestionable truth. Although those who advocate anarchism are as susceptible to dogmatism as participants in any other political tradition, any effort to produce doctrine is inevitably criticised as authoritarian. As Foucault points out, claims to truth are ultimately claims to authority (1980). This is consistent with the anarchist tradition of rejecting the authority-claims of church and State, which are based on an elitist access to truth. This rejection of doctrine leads to some confusion as to defining anarchism. Barbara Epstein (2001) recently argued that the anti-globalisation movement cannot be seen as anarchist, because as participants do not to read Bakunin in the same way that Marxists refer to the writings of Marx. Because anarchism rejects all forms of domination (e.g. in terms of the environment, gender, sexuality, colonialism, racism, economics, etc) there can be no anarchist centre, no anarchist doctrine, no anarchist equivalent of Marx or the Bible. Anarchism, in theory and in practice, is by necessity a multiplicity. As Sandra Jeppesen (2004) has argued,

I don't believe that any one person can encompass all this organising or theorising work. Nor do I believe that there can be a unifying theory



(certainly not post-structuralism) that will take all of these debates, and the many more that are out there, into consideration, in a sort of anarchist string theory of everything. At the same time, none of these struggles or ideas I have outlined occur independently of each other; rather they are all inter-related nodes in a rhizomic network. Thus I believe that there should be as many theorists as possible, working together or separately; indeed that every person is a theorist of anarchy, which they express as they put their ideas and beliefs into transformative and transcendent action.

Although only a few of the participants might identify themselves as theorists of anarchy, the examples in this chapter and the previous one demonstrate the ways in which these individuals have developed relationships without domination. They have found ways to resist representation and to practice autonomy. This is not to suggest that the relationships are perfect anarchies, as there may well be instances of domination within them, or that these participants are 'anarchists'. Rather, their experiences tell us something important about political practice. Orientation, sexual or otherwise, can be resisted through the practice of supportive and challenging relationships: where 'truth' is neither singular nor fixed, but multiple and negotiated; where emotions and desires are not denied, but shared and explored; where creativity and communication are encouraged, but boundaries are also respected. Even when limited to intimate relationships, such practices have profound impacts on individual subjectivities. If expanded to define all relationships, 'public' and 'private', we would 'summon forth a new world' where nomadism would flourish and where 'truths' of 'sexual orientation' and State apparatuses would be consigned to history.



## Chapter Nine

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### Towards a World without Borders

*Utopia is on the horizon: I walk two steps, it takes two steps back. I walk ten steps and it is ten steps further away. What is utopia for? It is for this, for walking.*

-- Eduardo Galeano

*I wanted to see something about her -- I wanted you to see what real courage is, instead of getting the idea that courage is a man with a gun in his hand. It's when you know you're licked before you begin but you begin anyway and you see it through no matter what. You rarely win, but sometimes you do.*

-- Harper Lee, *To Kill a Mockingbird*

For some, it may seem like a strange move that I have made: from asking strangers intimate questions about their sexual desires and practices to advocating anarchist politics. Indeed, it sometimes seems strange to me. But, this move has followed on from the aims I defined in the introduction. They were: 1) to better understand this concept we call 'sexual orientation' by understanding how (some) people live in relation to it; and 2) to think about what these understandings can tell us about possibilities for political activism. Dissatisfied with my own experiences of participating in identity politics and unsure about this thing called queer theory, I decided to talk to people about their experiences of identity and desire. As I described in Chapter Four, I chose people living in mixed relationships because I was interested in issues of difference and I expected people living with differences of sexual orientation identity would have interesting experiences and theories of those experiences. In doing so, I came up with some answers to my questions about 'sexual orientation'.

In keeping with social constructionist and poststructuralist work, I argue that sexual orientation is not a characteristic of individuals. This perspective sees orientation as a noun -- to be oriented in a particular direction like a compass. I suggest, rather, that there is more

value in seeing orientation as a process by which individuals are encouraged to think of themselves as having sexual desires that are oriented in a particular direction. Orientation in this sense is more like one usage of the word in the United States which describes an event where people new to a system or institution learn how it works and how they are expected to participate in it (e.g. new student orientation). Used in this sense, people do not have sexual orientations, they are sexually oriented or, in other words, given sexual directions. As I described in Chapter Six, this occurs through practices of representation, that is telling people who they are or what they (should) want. Not only are people 'kept in line' through practices of representation, but it is through repetition of these practices that the 'line' is (continuously) produced. In Chapter Three, I suggested that this 'line' might be understood in terms of Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the state-form. Sexual orientation is consistent with the State; both depend on processes of containing diversity, processes of 'overcoding'. As Todd May (1994) explained, 'overcoding is not unique to State apparatuses but occur wherever social operations try to subsume large regions of practices under single principles or categories that are to act at once as modes of comprehension and standards of judgment of those practices' (p 106). In the example of sexual orientation, diverse sexual desires, practices and relationships as well as forms of gender expression (just to name the most obvious) are overcoded; that is they are understood and judged in terms of sexual orientation categories. In Chapter Six, I demonstrated how participants were expected to be consistent in terms of sexual orientation categories, and how they were judged for either being perceived to belong to a stigmatised category or failing to live up to expectations of a desirable one. I described this as 'compulsory sexual orientation'. Likewise, many of the participants described a parallel process of 'compulsory monogamy'. Failing to be appropriately contained within state-forms of sexual orientation and monogamy, resulted not only directly in (symbolic, physical, verbal and emotional) violence, but also indirectly in shame. The shame, if not openly acknowledged and accepted, can result in what Scheff (1990) refers to as pathological shame, that is feeling ashamed of one's shame. This results in excess of conformity to social standards, as can fear of punishment from others. Thus, like the State, sexual orientation is a system of organisation whose effects tend to reinforce its existence.

But resistance is possible. Despite these pressures, none of the participants were entirely complicit in the ongoing production of sexual orientation. They resisted being directed. They resisted orientation. In Chapters Five and Seven, I described how participants' identities, desires and relationships in many ways overflowed the containment of state-forms.

Compulsory sexual orientation was resisted through a variety of means, including simply rejecting sexual orientation identities, using labels tactically not to identify themselves as a particular type of being but to negotiate interactions with others, and also by deploying labels that were, for them in their context, open and flexible. Likewise, rather than categorising their sexual relationships as either monogamous or non-monogamous, I argued that each of the participants actively and respectfully negotiated with their partners to produce appropriate boundaries rather than to contain their relationships in a rigid category. Furthermore, participants' experiences challenged the components of the definition of sexual orientation: which (of two choices) gender are you and which (of two choices) gender do you find sexually desirable. Some had gender identities that could not be contained in either the gender state-forms. Others questioned how 'desire' could be so neatly categorised as sexual or non-sexual. For many, the relationship between gender and desire was very complex, including: desire for gender transgressions, desire for women but no preference for different lesbian genders, desires for different sexual practices with members of difference genders, and desires for people who fell outside of one's usual pattern of gendered desire. Finally, even the concept of what constituted a sexual practice was open to negotiation. These diverse forms of resisting orientation can be understood as nomadic, as that which escapes or evades capture by the overcoding of the state-form. They can also be understood as anarchist in another sense. In resisting orientation, they must actively produce alternative realities, which they do in conjunction with their partners and other people. In contrast to the representation of the State and sexual orientation, the participants in many ways experienced autonomy. Rather than being told how to live, they got together and worked it out for themselves. I described this process as involving the production of flexible and negotiated boundaries unlike the rigid borders of state-forms.

If, as queer theorists suggest, the hetero/homo division is central to the organisation of social life and the production of social knowledge in the overdeveloped world, then resistance to that division must be very difficult. Indeed, the stories from Chapters Five and Six describe brutal punishments for resistance. What enabled the participants to resist in such overt ways was the development of alternative ways of thinking and a sense of emotional entitlement, as I described in Chapter Eight. These intellectual and emotional changes were supported through access to alternative discourses, movement into more supportive time/space, and through relationships that were both supportive and challenging. The examples across participants within each of these rough categories were wildly different. Alternative discourses ranged

from *Sex and the City* to Buddhist texts, from queer/feminist magazines and women's music to science-fiction novels. Likewise, what constituted a more supportive space ranged from the obviously alternative (bisexual conferences, women only spaces and anarchic sex parties) to the more established (Quaker<sup>17</sup> meetings and urban areas). Supportive and challenging relationships, though diverse in their forms, incorporated common characteristics. Relationships were challenging because the people involved challenged each other to think differently about their perceptions of reality. At the same time, an ethic of care and communication within relationships supported participants to grow and change within the context of committed partnerships. Each of the elements that supported and enabled participants to resist orientation are also crucial to anarchist practice. The anarchist commitment to the inseparability of ends and means results in forms of practice that are consistent with the desired aim of social organisation without domination, where individuals are highly capable of co-operating to fulfill shared desires and also flexible enough to allow for individual freedom. Thus, it is unsurprising that the skills people develop in protest camps and other forms of collective organising should be the same skills developed in intimate relationships. Whether in terms of obedience to State authority or to rigid truths of sexual relationships and desires, capacities for resisting orientation must necessarily be the same.

In Chapters Two and Three, I suggested that queer theory and activism provide a stronger basis for a radical politics of sexuality than any form of identity politics or sexual citizenship. However, queer politics has been criticised for a number of factors that would limit its capacity to address sexuality. Queer has been charged with promoting individualistic sexual transgressions rather than collective struggle against oppression (including capitalism), failing to acknowledge feminist theory and the importance of gender, maintaining gay and lesbian identities as the centre of its politics and focusing on textual deconstructions to the neglect of institutional and material political interventions. I suggested that these criticisms could largely be addressed by a return to the anarchist roots of queer theory and activism found in direct action, nonhierarchical organisation, and poststructuralist theory. After analysing mixed identity relationships in relation to anarchist theory and practice, I could advocate a *queer anarchism*. Such a tactic has been taken up by activist networks not only to challenge LGBT organisations that fail to address a diversity of oppressive relations, but also to queer 'straight' anarchist politics (e.g. Queeruption). While such an approach certainly has a great deal value, such politics have had a tendency to have 'queer' identities at their centre.

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17 For connections between anarchism and the Quakers, see e.g., Purkis, 2004.

As I suggested Chapter Three, the word queer brings with it associations of (gendered and sexualised) transgression and, more specifically, homosexuality. Thus, at the same time as it provides a radical critique of identity politics, queer anarchism may maintain some of identity politics' limitations. Saying that, many people have found participation in such politics radically empowering. Meanwhile the possibilities of (more) explicitly anarchist queer theory seems to hold interesting possibilities. Such efforts might explore the relationship between the hetero/homo division and the hierarchical construction of State over society, for example.

Given these limitations as well as participants' diverse relationships with the term queer, I suggest an alternative: anarchism as an ethics of relationships. A definition of anarchism that places relationships and ethics at its centre is both a useful way of understanding the analysis that I have developed from this research project as well as providing a framework for political action, theoretical and otherwise, to address the issues it has raised. Participants' experiences of policing -- of shame, violence, representation and overcoding -- can be understood as stemming from unethical relationships. Resistance and empowerment, on the other hand, provide the basis for nomadic and autonomous relationships; that is, relationships that do not necessarily conform to representations of 'types' of relationships, but where the participants collectively and individually decide how to live their lives. As I described in Chapter Seven, this notion of autonomy is not that of an individual masculine liberalism, but one more consistent with the anarchist tradition of freedom in community (Notes from Nowhere, 2003), more recent feminist theorising (MacKenzie and Stoljar, 2000) and places where they have overlapped (Roseneil, 2000). Arguing for a definition of anarchism centred on relationships and ethics is not the promotion of a new form of anarchism, such as a queer anarchism may be, but one which is consistent with anarchist history. Anarchism is critical of capitalism because the latter is based on relationships of domination and exploitation. It is critical of the State because government creates and depends on hierarchical relationships. Ecological devastation is the result of instrumental relationships with the environment and each other. Racialisation and nationalism depend on exclusive and hierarchical relationships with Others. While not creating a new anarchism, this refocus does, in effect, *queer* anarchism. Much of anarchist politics does focus very much on the 'public' sphere, targeting capitalism and the State. Emphasising an ethics of relationships as the core of anarchist criticisms and ideals encourages a more explicit turn to queer and feminist politics and to issues of the 'private' sphere, including 'personal' relationships, sexuality and emotions. A relational understanding of anarchism, then, must

break down the divisions of public/private, individual/collective, autonomous/relational, hetero/homo, justice/care and other binaries that sustain the State apparatus and state-forms. It may also help address concerns within the anarchist movement of the development of a specialised 'activist role' which may separate 'activists' from 'ordinary people' (Anonymous, 2000a and 2000b). Rather than seeing anarchism as a practice of 'activists', we could see it as a widespread practice in relationships that should be supported to develop and expand into all aspects of life.

Finally, anarchism as an ethics of relationships fits into a long tradition, originating in feminist thought, that connects notions of 'sexual orientation' to wider political systems. Lesbian feminist criticism argued that heterosexuality and lesbianism could not be understood as individual characteristics, but as a compulsory system and resistance to it, respectively. Debates surrounding difference, both within and across identity categories, challenged the singularity of this approach. In Todd May's terms, lesbian feminism was strategic in that it represented domination entirely in terms of patriarchy, which could be resisted by the strategy of lesbianism (or, a range of similar strategies from a lesbian continuum), regardless of context or situation. Criticisms of strategic feminism by working class women, women of colour and sex radicals pointed to the diverse ways in which women were oppressed to which no singular feminism could respond. Indeed, in response to cultural feminist attempts to circumscribe appropriate anti-patriarchal sexuality, sex-positive feminist suggested that perhaps sexuality should be understood as its own axis of oppression, not subject primarily to feminist theorising. Poststructuralist feminism took these arguments one step further, arguing that there could be no singular category of 'women' upon which to base political movement. Thus, more nuanced efforts to understand the relationship between sexuality and political order must incorporate a recognition of difference. The politics of sexual or intimate citizenship attempts to do precisely that, within the terms of liberal democracy. Such theorising draws on the work of Anthony Giddens, who has suggested that a radical democratisation of intimacy may lead to greater democracy in the 'public' sphere. However, the elitism of Giddens' conception of 'democracy' is made clear when he compares democratic order to parent-child relationships.

Can a relationship between a parent and young child be democratic? It can, and should be, in exactly the same sense as is true of a democratic political order. It is a right of the child, in other words, to be treated as a putative equal of the adult. Actions which cannot be negotiated directly



with the child, because he or she is too young to grasp one is entailed, should be capable of counterfactual justification. The presumption is that agreement could be reached, and trust sustained, if the child were sufficiently autonomous to be able to deploy arguments on equal basis to the adult (1992:191-192).

This is precisely the anarchist critique of the 'democratic' State. Government takes a parental role with regard to the rest of the population which presumes some incapacity on the part of 'ordinary' people. Anarchism, on the other hand, I suggest, provides a more consistent basis for a politics of relationships (including sexuality) that values equality and diversity than that which results in most adults being treated as young children. Hierarchies not only inhibit people's capacity to develop the skills and capacities necessary for autonomous relationships, but, as I argued in Chapter Three, they also result in pathological shame and excessive conformity. Any social order that seriously values relationships must reject hierarchy for networks of egalitarian relationships, representation for autonomy, and the overcoding of state-forms and borders for the openness and fluidity of nomadism and negotiable boundaries. It must reject sexual orientation for the freedom to acknowledge and explore diverse forms of (sexual) relationships, desires and practices without fear of violence or shame. 'For a social world in which emotional fulfilment replaced the maximising of economic growth would be very different from that which we know at present' (1992:3). Indeed. It would be anarchy.

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# Appendix I: Early Interview Schedule

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02/11/01

## **Introduction:**

This interview should last around 1 to 1 1/2 hours, though we can talk longer if you like. As we will be talking about issues surrounding your relationship with your partner and sexual orientation, you may consider some of the questions to be rather personal. I want to make sure that you feel comfortable. If there are any questions that you do not wish to answer or any topics you do not wish to discuss, I will respect your wishes. I would also like to ask your permission to tape record this interview. Only myself and possibly a professional transcriber will hear the tape. After that, transcripts from the interviews will be anonymised. You can choose your own pseudonym if you want to. After I have finished a research project, I will provide you with a summary of the results. Does that seem reasonable? Do you have any questions?

If they ask about my own sexual orientation identity or relationship status, I will tell them that I am happy to talk about that at the end of the interview. I expect that information might affect the way the interview goes.

**BACKGROUND** -- I'm going to start off with a few short questions about your background and your life now.

What do you do?

Do you own your home?

Where are you from originally?

Urban or rural?

How long have you lived here?

Do you consider yourself religious?

Were you brought up with a religion?

When you were growing up, was your family comfortable about sex?

What sort of ideas did they have about how boys and girls should act?

**SEXUAL ORIENTATION** -- Now I'd like to move on to sexual orientation.

Do you think of yourself as having a sexual orientation?

Are there any labels you like to use?

What does that mean to you?

Where do you think your sexual orientation comes from?

Do you think it has ever changed?

Do you think it ever could?

Why or why not?  
How do think you might feel if it did?

How important do you think your sexual orientation is to your identity?  
Has this changed over time?  
Do you think there are other things about yourself that are more important?

Do you think there are any advantages to being [label]?  
What about disadvantages?

**YOUR RELATIONSHIP** -- Can we talk about your relationship now?

How long have you and your partner been together?  
Do you live together? How long have you been living together?

How did you meet?

When you met, did you know your partner's sexual identity?  
If so, how did you feel about that at the time?  
Do you think this might have been a factor in your attraction towards them?  
If not, when did you find out?  
How did you feel when you did find out?  
Have those feelings changed over time?

Does it seem it seems you like you are in a "mixed" relationship?  
If so, how? If not, why not?  
Thinking back, do you think this has changed over time?

[If 'straight'] Before you met your partner, had you had relationships or friendships with people who had a different sexual orientation identity from yourself?  
Do you think this had an affect on your thoughts and feelings about sexual orientation?

Do you feel you have benefited from having a partner with a different sexual orientation identity?  
Has your relationship made you think about your own identity differently?

Do you think your thoughts and attitudes about sexual orientation have changed over the course of your relationship?

(If mixed sex) are you married or engaged?  
Would you consider getting married?  
Does this [cause tension with/get approval from] queer identified friends?  
What about straight friends and family?

Has sexual orientation ever been an issue as part of your conflicts with your partner?  
Do you want to tell me what happened?  
Serious or joking -- how did make you feel?

Have you ever experienced pressures as a mixed identity couple that made you consider



splitting up?

If so, what have the pressures been?

## **RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHERS**

Do people make assumptions about your sexuality or politics because of your relationship?

(For example that you are both straight or gay, sexually open, a traitor, liberal)

Do people assume make other assumptions about your relationship?

How to feel about this?

How do you deal with this?

Do your friends and family know about your identities?

How do they feel about this?

Do you receive support?

Do they raise concerns?

Have you experienced harassment, prejudice or discrimination as an individual or couple?

This might include physical attacks, sexual innuendo that made you uncomfortable, name calling, job discrimination, threats, sexual violence, nasty comments, etc.

If so, what has happened?

How have you responded?

Have you dealt with these issues with your partner?

Do you and your partner talk about other people you find attractive?

If not, why do you think you don't?

If so, is this comfortable?

Does it make a difference whether the other person is of the same or other sex?

Have you and your partner discussed monogamy?

Can I ask what you have decided for your relationship?

Do you stick to this agreement?

Do you think your partner does?

Who are the people you feel closest to?

Who are the people you spend the most of your time with?

Are you involved in any (sexual orientation category) specific groups?

**Place** -- now I want to ask you some questions about where you spend your time

How much time to spend at work?

What is it like there? How do people talk about sexuality there?

Do you feel comfortable there?

Where else do you spend your time?

What is it like in those places? How do people talk about sexuality in those places?

Do you feel comfortable in those places?

Where do you spend your leisure time?

What is it like there? How do people talk about sexuality there?  
Do you feel comfortable there?

How do you feel about events like Pride Scotland?  
Have you ever been to Pride Scotland?  
Alone or as a couple?  
How did you feel?

Do you go to other gay events or venues?  
Do you consider yourself as part of a gay or queer community? Does your partner?

Are there any other places where you feel either particularly comfortable or particularly uncomfortable?

**Conclusion** -- just two more things

Have you had conversations with your partner about this upcoming interview? What did you talk about? You don't need to tell me what it was, but I'm interested in knowing whether there was anything you decided you didn't want to talk about.

The report I will write for people who agreed to be interviewed will discuss what I think the interviews can tell us about how the concept of sexual orientation affects people. Although I cannot guarantee I will cover every issue which everyone is interested in, I would like to know if there is anything else you would be interested in knowing about the other people I interview.

Is there anything else you want to say or anything you want to ask me about?

I just want to say again that the information you have provided me will be kept anonymous.  
Would you like to choose your own pseudonym or should I choose one for you?

## Appendix II: Overambitious Interview Schedule

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01/02/02

### **Introduction:**

This interview should last around 1 to 1 1/2 hours, though we can talk longer if you like. As we will be talking about issues surrounding your relationship with your partner and sexual orientation, you may consider some of the questions to be rather personal. I want to make sure that you feel comfortable. If there are any questions that you do not wish to answer or any topics you do not wish to discuss, I will respect your wishes. I would also like to ask your permission to tape record this interview. Only myself and possibly a professional transcriber will hear the tape. After that, transcripts from the interviews will be anonymised. You can choose your own pseudonym if you want to. After I have finished a research project, I will provide you with a summary of the results. Are you happy with all of that? Do you have any questions?

If they ask about my own sexual orientation identity or relationship status, I will tell them that I am happy to talk about that at the end of the interview. I expect that information might affect the way the interview goes.

**A. BACKGROUND--** First of all, do you mind telling me a little bit about yourself?

How old are you?

Have you always lived here?

**No--** How long have you lived here? Where did you live previously?

Are you currently employed?

**Yes--** What do you do? Did you require qualifications?

Have you had different jobs before your current one?

**No --** Have you previously been employed?

**Yes--** What did you do? Did you require qualifications?

Do you have any hobbies?

Do you donate money to, or get involved with, any charity or voluntary work?

Do you own your home?

Do you consider yourself religious?

Were you brought up with a religion?

Can you tell me a little bit about the family you grew up in?

When you were growing up, was your family comfortable about sex?

What sort of ideas did they have about how boys and girls should act?

How would you identify yourself in terms of class?

And in terms of nationality? How about ethnicity? And gender?

**B. SEXUAL ORIENTATION**-- Now I'd like to move on to sexual orientation.

Do you think of yourself as having a sexual orientation?

How do you feel about sexual orientation labels?

Are there any labels you like to use?

**Yes** -- How well do you feel that [identity] is a good label for you?

**No** -- Why not?

How long have you thought of yourself as [identity]?

Have the labels that you use to describe your sexual orientation changed over time?

**Yes** -- why?

Do you think your sexual orientation has changed over time?

**Yes** -- What happened? How did you feel?

**No** -- Do you think it ever could?

Why or why not?

How do think you might feel if it did?

Would matter how it changed?

Have you ever felt like you were "coming out of the closet" about your sexual orientation?

Do you think it is important for lesbian, gay and bisexual people to "come out"?

Why or why not?

Do you think coming out is important politically?

Do you think it is important for heterosexual people to talk about their sexualities?

Why or why not?

Do you think this is different from "coming out"?

[If monosexual identified] Have you ever been attracted to someone who was [other sex category]?

**Yes** -- Can you tell me what happened?

**No**-- Do you think you ever could be?

[If monosexual identified] Have you ever had a sexual fantasy or dream about someone who was [other sex category]?

**Yes** -- How did that make you feel?

**No**-- Do you think you ever might?

What do you think are in the main things that you find attractive about other people?

How important do you think that gender is in your attraction to other people?

Is your [sexual orientation identity] very important to how you think about yourself?

Has this changed over time?

Do you think there are other things about yourself that are more important?

Do you think there are any advantages to being [label]?

What about disadvantages?

What do you think about the phrase "straight acting"?

Do you read any of the gay, lesbian or bisexual press?

Why or why not?

What do you think of it?

Have you ever then involved in any more gay, lesbian or bisexual groups?

Why or why not?

What was it like?

Have you ever you supported any gay, lesbian or bisexual political organisations?

**No** -- Why not?

**Yes** -- Why?

Which ones?

How?

Do you think any issues are specifically gay, lesbian or bisexual issues?

**Yes** -- Can you give me some examples?

Do you think that straight identified people are affected by these issues?

**No** -- why not?

**C. YOUR RELATIONSHIP**-- Can we talk about relationships now?

Have you had any other committed romantic relationships besides your current partner?

For each one: how long did it last?

Did you live together?

Did your partner have the same sexual orientation identity as you?

Briefly, could you describe your relationship and how it ended?

Have you had sexual experiences with others besides committed romantic partners?

How long have you and your partner been together?

Do you live together? How long have you been living together?

How did you meet?

Were you attracted to them the first time you met?

What was it about your partner that you first found attractive about them?

When you met, did you know your partner's sexual identity? Did they know yours?

If so, how did you feel about that at the time?

Do you think this might have been a factor in your attraction towards them?

If not, when did you find out?

How did you feel when you did find out?

Have those feelings changed over time?

How would you say your relationship compares to the ideal of a traditional or conventional one?

How equal do you think your relationship is?

Does it seem you like you are in a "mixed" relationship?

If so, how? If not, why not?

Thinking back, do you think this has changed over time?

[If 'straight'] Before you met your partner, had you had relationships or friendships with people who had a different sexual orientation identity from yourself?

Do you think this had an affect on your thoughts and feelings about sexual orientation?

Do you feel you have benefited from having a partner with a different sexual orientation identity?

Has your relationship made you think about your own identity differently?

Do you think your thoughts and attitudes about sexual orientation have changed over the course of your relationship?

(If mixed sex) are you married or engaged?

Would you consider getting married?

Do you think of this gets approval from any your friends or family?

Do you think any of your friends or family (would) disapprove of marriage?

Have you ever had or considered having a commitment ceremony?

Do you think of this gets approval from any your friends or family?

Do you think any of your friends or family (would) disapprove?

How important do you think is sex to your relationship?

Do you think that your sexual attraction for your partner or your sex life together is affected by your sexual orientations?

Do you think your sex life would be different if you both had the same sexual orientation?

Has sexual orientation ever been an issue as part of your conflicts with your partner?

Do you want to tell me what happened?

Serious or joking -- how did it make you feel?

Have you ever experienced pressures as a mixed identity couple that made you consider splitting up?

If so, what have the pressures been?

#### **D. RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHERS**

Do you think people make assumptions about your sexuality because of your relationship?

How to feel about this?

How do you deal with this?

Do your friends and family know about you and your partners' identities?

How do they feel about this?

Do you receive support?

Do they raise concerns?

Have you ever been called a derogatory name having to do with sexual orientation, like poof, dyke, queer or breeder?

If so, what has happened?

How have you responded?

Have you dealt with these issues with your partner?

Have you ever experienced any other forms of abuse?

What about physical attacks?

Sexual harassment or sexual violence?

If so, what has happened?

How have you responded?

Have you dealt with these issues with your partner?

Have you ever felt that you have suffered discrimination because of others perceptions of your identity or relationship?

If so, what has happened?

How have you responded?

Have you dealt with these issues with your partner?

Have you ever felt excluded from a gay venue or event because you were perceived as being straight or not queer enough?

If so, what has happened?

How have you responded?

Have you dealt with these issues with your partner?

Has anyone ever assumed that it would be acceptable to make homophobic, biphobic or anti-straight jokes or comments in front of you?

If so, what has happened?

How have you responded?

Have you dealt with these issues with your partner?

Do you and your partner talk about other people you find attractive?

If not, why do you think you don't?

If so, is this comfortable?

Does it make a difference whether the other person is of the same or other sex?

Have you and your partner discussed monogamy?

Have you agreed on an arrangement?

How do feel about that?

Who are the people you feel closest to?

How do you know each of these people?

How would you describe your relationships with each of these people?

Are there any issues which you can talk about more easily with some of these people than others?

What about issues around sex and sexuality?

What do you think it is about [these people] that makes it easier for you to talk about [these issues]?

Does it have to do with (prompt as appropriate) gender, sexuality, politics, age?

Who are the people you spend the most of your time with?

How would you describe their sexual identities and politics?

Are you involved in any (sexual orientation category) specific groups?

**E. Place** -- now I want to ask you some questions about where you spend your time

How much time to spend at work?

What is it like there? How do people talk about sexuality there?

Do you feel comfortable there?

Where else do you spend your time?

What is it like in those places? How do people talk about sexuality in those places?

Do you feel comfortable in those places?

Where do you spend your leisure time?

What is it like there? How do people talk about sexuality there?

Do you feel comfortable there?

How do feel about Pride events?

Have you ever been to a Pride event?

Alone or as a couple?

How did you feel?

Do you go to other gay events or venues?

Do you consider yourself as part of a gay or queer community? Does your partner?

Are there are other places where you feel either particularly comfortable or particularly uncomfortable?

**Conclusion** -- just a couple more things

Have you had conversations with your partner about this upcoming interview? What did you talk about? You don't need to tell me what it was, but I'm interested in knowing whether there was anything you decided you didn't want to talk about.

Can I ask why you agreed to participate in this interview?

The report I will write for people who agreed to be interviewed will discuss what I think the interviews can tell us about how the concept of sexual orientation affects people. Although I cannot guarantee I will cover every issue which everyone is interested in, I would like to know if there is anything else you would be interested in knowing about the other people I interview.

Is there anything else you want to say or anything you want to ask me about?

I just want to say again that the information you have provided me will be kept anonymous. Would you like to choose your own pseudonym or should I choose one for you?



# Appendix III: Focussed Interview Schedule

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09/10/02

## **Introduction:**

This interview should last around 2 hours, though we can talk longer if you like. As we will be talking about issues surrounding your relationship with your partner and sexual orientation, you may consider some of the questions to be rather personal. I want to make sure that you feel comfortable. If there are any questions that you do not wish to answer or any topics you do not wish to discuss, I will respect your wishes. I would also like to ask your permission to tape record this interview. Only myself and possibly a professional transcriber will hear the tape. After that, transcripts from the interviews will be anonymised. You can choose your own pseudonym if you want to. After I have finished the research project, I will provide you with a summary of the results. Are you happy with all of that? Do you have any questions?

**A. BACKGROUND** -- First of all, do you mind telling me a little bit about yourself?

How old are you?

Have you always lived in [this city/area]?

**No** -- How long have you lived here? Where did you live previously?

Are you currently employed?

**Yes** -- What do you do? Did you require qualifications?

How would you identify yourself in terms of class?

And in terms of nationality? How about ethnicity? And gender?

## **B. SEXUAL ORIENTATION IDENTITY**

Do you think of yourself as having a sexual orientation?

**Yes** -- How would you describe it?

What does that label mean to you?

Why do you use that label?

How accurate do you feel that label is?

**No** -- what does that mean to you?

How long have you thought of yourself as [label]?

Why did you choose that label originally?

Are there are other labels that you have used or sometimes use now?

Why have you changed labels?

In what contexts do you use different labels?

Have you ever questioned or been confused about your sexual identity?

Can I ask you about how you feel about other labels being applied to you?

‘straight’ or ‘straight-acting’?  
‘gay’ or ‘camp’?  
‘lesbian’ or ‘dykey’?  
‘queer’?  
‘bisexual’?  
‘masculine’ or ‘butch’?  
‘feminine’ or ‘femme’?

Do you think your feelings about any of those labels have changed over time?

[If monosexual identified] Have you known someone of the same/other sex to be attracted to you?

Were there any particular incidents?  
How did/does that make you feel?  
Do you think you would feel differently about that now than you did then?

Has anyone ever tried to label you [bisexual or straight or gay]?

Were there any particular incidents?  
How did/does that make you feel?  
Do you think you would feel differently about that now than you did then?

## **B. FEELINGS ABOUT SEXUALITY**

Can you think of any examples where you have felt embarrassed, guilty or ashamed about something to do with sex?

Have you ever felt like there was something wrong with you because of your sexuality?

Can you think of any examples where you have felt comfortable or happy about your sexuality?

Do you think your feelings about sexuality have changed as you have grown older?

How?  
What do you think has led to these changes?

Do you talk with other people about your emotions surrounding sexuality?

How do you feel talking about sexuality with me now?

## **C. SEXUAL ATTRACTIONS, BEHAVIOURS, DESIRES & FANTASIES**

If you were writing a personal advertisement for a sexual partner, what characteristics would you say you were looking for?

Do you think you have a type or types of person you are attracted to?

How would you describe them?

Do you think that the types of people you find sexually attractive has changed over time?

**Yes** – how?  
Why do you think that is?

What was it about your partner that you first found attractive about them?

What do you find sexy or attractive about your partner now?

Do you think your partner's sexual orientation identity has ever affected your attraction towards them?

Have you ever felt any sort of attraction for someone who you didn't expect to?

**Yes** -- Can you tell me what happened?

**No** -- Do you think you ever could be?

Do you have sexual fantasies?

What do you fantasise about?

Who are of the people in your fantasies?

Have you ever had a sexual fantasy or dream about someone who was you didn't expect to?

**Yes** -- How did that make you feel?

**No** -- Do you think you ever might?

Do you think you could be, or have you ever been, attracted to a “chick with a dick,” a man with a vulva, or a person with ambiguous genitals?

How do you feel about erotic stories, photographs and films?

What sorts of stories or images do you find sexy?

Do you and your partner enjoy erotic material together?

Do you and [partner name] talk about other people you find sexually attractive?

**No** -- Why do you think you don't?

**Yes** -- Is this comfortable?

Does it make a difference whether the other person is of the same or other sex?

Have you and [partner name] discussed monogamy?

Have you agreed on an arrangement?

How do feel about that?

Do you ever feel jealousy with your partner?

What sorts of things make you feel jealous?

Does the gender of the other person matter?

How do you deal with jealousy?

On a more practical level of learning about sex, can you tell me a bit about your sexual history?

First experiences?

Sexual activities?

Partners?

How would you describe your sex life with your partner?

What are your favourite sexual activities?

[if non-monogamous] And your sex life outside your relationship?

Are there any sexual activities that you would not like to try because the idea makes you uncomfortable?

Do you think that your sex life with [partner name] is affected by your sexual orientations?

Do you think your sex life would be different if you both thought of yourselves as [participant's label]?

What about if you both thought of yourselves as [partner's label]?

**Conclusion** -- just a couple more things

Have you had conversations with [partner name] about this upcoming interview? What did you talk about? You don't need to tell me what it was, but I'm interested in knowing whether there was anything you decided you didn't want to talk about.

Can I ask why you agreed to participate in this interview?

The report I will write for people who agreed to be interviewed will discuss what I think the interviews can tell us about how the concept of sexual orientation affects people. Although I cannot guarantee I will cover every issue which everyone is interested in, I would like to know if there is anything else you would be interested in knowing about the other people I interview.

Is there anything else you want to say or anything you want to ask me about?

Did you give any answers where you changed your mind after you said it?

Do you feel comfortable with everything you have said? Is there anything that you want me to be extra cautious about making extra anonymous? (Like if there is something you would feel uncomfortable your partner knowing that you said to me). If you later decided that there is something you want made extra anonymous or that you don't want on the record, let me know and we can work something out.

## Appendix IV: Participant List

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**Alasdair** was in his late sixties and had been with his wife for over 25 years. He identified as bisexual, though earlier in life had thought of himself as gay and was surprised to be attracted to his wife when they first met. In addition to his marriage, he also had casual sexual relationships with men.

**Anne** was in her late twenties. She had been in a partnership with a man for several years, in which they had agreed not have sexual experiences with others. Anne had identified as bisexual for much of her life, but after an unpleasant same-sex experience stopped being attracted to women and came to identify as heterosexual.

**Anita** identified as poly/dyke/switch, meaning she was interested in maintaining ongoing multiple romantic and/or sexual relationships, was only sexual attracted to men, enjoyed giving and receiving pain in S/M play and was also happy to switch butch/femme gender roles. She was in her early thirties. She had multiple play partners, most of whom identified as bisexual, and was actively seeking more.

**Beth** identified either as queer or bisexual and considered herself non-gendered. She was married to a man who did not label himself. They had agreed not have sexual relationships outside of the marriage. Beth was in her late twenties.

**Diane** had identified as lesbian until she found it too restrictive and came to call herself queer and 'a bit sort of fluid on gender'. She was involved in two significant erotic relationships: one with a male friend and another with a genderqueer ex-girlfriend. Diane was in her early thirties.

**Douglas** was in his late fifties and married. They had always agreed that he would have relationships with men as well. Although he found the idea of a sexual identity label appealing, none of them fit. This had advantages as well, he thought.

**Erica** long struggled with finding a sexual identity and felt much better when she gave up. She was in a long-term relationship with a gay-identified man. Both of them were free to engage in outside sexual relationships, though neither had the energy for multiple committed romances. She was in her early thirties and liked the word queer.

**Eva** was in her mid-twenties and identified as either bisexual or queer. She was in a relationship with a man where they had agreed not to have sex with other people, but actively discussed the possibility that it might happen. Her partner had only ever desired women but kept an open mind.

**Kev** was willing to use the label bisexual, but did not consider it an identity. He was in his early thirties and in a non-monogamous relationship with a man who had tried most sexual orientation labels and had given up on them.

**Laurence** was in his mid-twenties. He had only ever been sexual attracted to women, though was open to entertaining other possibilities and did not identify himself in terms of sexual orientation. He was in a monogamous relationship with a woman who identified herself as queer/bisexual.

**Mark** was in his early forties. His identity has shifted from homophobic, macho straight man to a rejection of sexual orientation. His relationships included a long-term loving sexual relationship with a gay identified man and a recent girlfriend who identified as straight.

**Meg** used various labels, including queer bisexual, always with the understanding among her friends that they did not denote a fixed identity. She was in an open relationship with a gay identified man. Meg was disappointed that all of her sexual encounters over the past three years had been with men and was looking for the opportunity to demonstrate that her bisexuality was not just theoretical. She was in her mid-thirties.

**Melissa** was in her mid twenties and did not use any labels. She was in a monogamous relationship with a man, though the boundaries in this regard were under discussion and had changed since the interview.

**Pete** was married to a woman who identified as bisexual. He had never been sexually attracted to another man nor did he expect to ever be, though could imagine falling in love with one. He was in his late twenties and preferred not to label himself.

**Phyllis** was in her late thirties. She had had long-term relationships with both women and men and considered herself either queer, but sometimes used bisexual. She was in a monogamous relationship with a straight-identified man.

**Sandra** was married to a straight identified man with whom she had a monogamous relationship. She was in her early forties and identified as bisexual and dykey.