Chapter Four

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.*
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> -- Albert Einstein
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> *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 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

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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). 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[5]. 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[6]

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.

Policing		*Resistance*		*Empowerment*	
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 arbourescence: 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.
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> Jamie: Do you think you will tell him that you've done the interview?
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> 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 as 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[7], sexual identity and stigma, peer pressure,

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7   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[8]. 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.