The Discursive Domain of Coupledom:
A post-structuralist psychology of its productions and regulations

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“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.”

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STATEMENT OF AUTHENTICATION

The work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original except as acknowledged in the text. I hereby declare that I have not submitted this material, either in full or in part, for a degree at this or any other institution.

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(Mark Finn)
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TRANSCRIPTION SYMBOLS

/ / Surround an interjection. For example, ‘I’d come home. / MF: mm mm / And that’s the best way I can explain it.’

( ) Indicates a pause.

[ ... ] Indicates that part of the transcript has been omitted.

( ) These brackets are used around added information to the transcript such as the instance of laughter or giggling.

{ } These brackets are used around added information to the transcript where additional information is necessary for clarity of meaning. For example, ‘It {sex} is the most profound type of intimacy.’

___ Underlining indicates where words or phrases are stressed.

Sounds such as ‘mm’ are transcribed phonetically, as are colloquialisms, abbreviations and half-spoken words. In order to make the transcripts readable, punctuation is added to utterances that may have been ungrammatical.

Following Malson (1998; cf. Potter and Wetherell, 1987), the above transcription symbols were used to stress readability rather than the detailing of features of speech and dialogue such as intonation, length of pauses or the overlapping of utterances.
ABSTRACT

Since the early 1980s social psychology has generated much empirical knowledge and many related ‘truth’ claims concerning the ‘nature’ and ‘experience’ of the (hetero-patriarchal) couple relationship; identifying and reifying certain patterns and components, prescribing particular relational behaviours and subjectivities while also consolidating socio-cultural ideations about what it is to be ‘paired’ in romantic relationships and how these can be ‘successfully’ maintained. From a post-structuralist perspective and drawing on Foucauldian theory in particular, this qualitative research critiques the ‘psy’-disciplines’s positivistic generation and naturalisation of the socio-historically specific power-knowledge of contemporary Western coupledom as a ‘naturally’ occurring human phenomenon.

In particular, it is the discursive practices and values of couple exclusivity, commitment, trust and intimacy that are targeted in this denaturalisation of the ‘stable’, ‘contained’ and ‘authentic’ couple and coupled-subject and which are deconstructed as practices of freedom and truth manifest across ‘conventional’ and ‘alternative’ relationships. The argument is made that the politically sedimented and governing power-knowledge of contemporary coupledom, imbricated in a constitutive binary framework and structuralist ontology, constitutes couples and coupled-subjects in accordance with a particular relation to truth; a required relation to a discursive ‘truth’ of relationships and selves that (re)produces relations of power and that disciplines the couple domain and its population in the various relational and self-technologies it makes available.

This thesis stages its post-structuralist psychology using the related methods of Foucauldian informed etymological and discourse analyses. The etymological analysis is a semantic history of key words and concepts deployed in the practice of contemporary coupledom, giving emphasis to its socio-historic contingency. This study conceptually grounds the discourse analysis which uses material from 28 interviews conducted with heterosexual and same sex, monogamous and non-monogamous couples and individuals, married and unmarried, co-habiting and not, to explore the productivity and regulation of couple-discourses and subjectivities in the present. Interpreting coupledom as a discursive regime, the delimitations of knowledge and possibility are problematised and consideration is given to a possible resistance not predicated on liberal-humanist and binary notions of ‘freedom’ and ‘security’.
CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

“[M]an does not unite with a woman solely for procreation, but also for seeking what is indispensable to exist … That is why in this sort of affection, the useful is joined to the agreeable.”

(Aristotle, 'The Nicomachean Ethics', viii,12, 7)

“Here we are at the dawn of a new millennium still cherishing the belief that being a part of a couple represents some central part of being human.”

(Yalom and Carstensen (2002:1)

1.1 What is being done

This thesis is about the knowledge, power, and discursive production of contemporary Western coupledom. It is about an annexed domain of intelligibility; a privileged dominion of knowledge and experience wherein, as Aristotle observes, the ‘useful is joined to the agreeable’ in a maximisation of health, well-being and human existence. It concerns the socio-historic, politically sedimented ‘truths’ that are tied to, and mobilised by, the various practices (components and qualities) of coupledom that we commonly deploy so as to make our partnerships and ourselves intelligible, authentic, certain and complete. It questions the functions of this culturally dominant knowledge-practice that aligns the politically ‘useful’ with the psychologically ‘agreeable’ and that serves to establish the ‘truth’ of paired relationships and people. And it challenges the ‘expertise’ of psychology in the production of this knowledge, highlighting the ‘illusory and arbitrary’ connection (Nietzsche, 1887b; Foucault, 1973b) between the social scientific knowledge of coupledom and its ‘objective’ truth as a relationship of power wherein the object of investigation is not so much revealed but fictioned as truth (Foucault, 1977e: 193) as science purports to examine it and measure its qualities.
In this exploration of coupledom a post-structuralist epistemology and Foucauldian theory, in particular, are drawn on as the means by which coupledom can be effectively challenged as a ‘naturally’ occurring phenomenon and way of (or key to) life and re-conceptualised as a productive and regulatory arrangement of contained spaces and dichotomised ‘realities’, of securities/fears, gazes/visibilities, desires/satisfactions, modes of speech, freedoms, and of ethical self-technologies (or ways of working on ourselves; Foucault, 1988) that establish, and are under the authority of, various relations of power. By ‘relations of power’ I am referring to historically constituted, shifting, and contextually specific configurations of social and subjective practices and forms of knowledge (Foucault, 1980). So in what follows, the practice of coupledom is not seen as having its origin in the instincts or desires of humanity, as being pre-figured in natural affections or passions, but is conceived as a particular site for the formation of a Truth “through which one sees certain forms of subjectivity, certain object domains, certain types of knowledge come into being” (Foucault, 1973b: 4).

This research does not aim to de-shackle couples from a dominating, moralising power that simply represses, nor does it add to the existing body of liberal-humanist literature that proposes a more liberal, ‘freer’ way of being paired and in so doing adheres to polarised notions of power and resistance wherein a self-evident resistance is perceived as always being antithetical to and outside of power (see Foucault, 1978a, 1983; cf. Knights and Vurdubakis, 1994). I do, however, seek to unsettle the current practices of coupledom as alleged keys to personal freedom and a fulfilled, secure life but which simultaneously delimit other ways of knowing ourselves and of relating to others. So the values and qualities of ‘freedom’, ‘security’, ‘exclusivity’, ‘authenticity’ and of personal and relational ‘stability’, for example, are not re-worked to approximate a better, liberal kind of truth but are challenged precisely because they already work to establish the ‘truth’ of ourselves and our partnerships. It is, therefore, the elaborate and productive power-knowledge of coupledom that is here called into question as its ‘normative’ components and assumed ‘qualities’ are deconstructed without aiming to suggest a more enlightened or more authentic way of being paired.

The term ‘coupledom’, then, refers to the constitutive and fortifying knowledge-practice of romantic relationships as a specific field of intelligibility and relay of power. It refers to those converging discourses (the romantic, sexual, economic, and psychological discourses for example), or those sets of systematic and institutionalised statements to do with sexual and
emotional pairing which produce the couple as both the object of discourse and discursive practice (or social action). As further detailed in chapter three, discourses are understood as a unified system of statements, or bodies of constructed knowledge, that operate as social practice and which create the very objects and ‘realities’ of which they speak (Foucault, 1972). Simply put, ways in which we talk about coupledom determine and invent the thing itself and fashion the ways we know and practice it. As we talk about coupledom in theory and in everyday conversation, we continually produce and reproduce the shared knowledge of it rather than merely reflect a meaning that pre-exists or is anterior to culturally embedded ways of talking. In that discourses, or the shared ways in which we talk about the couple relationship, create the thing, make it appear as ‘real’, determine how we know it, relate to it, and live it, there is always at work a power which produces the couple relationship, our experience of it and ourselves in it, as something in particular and not as anything else (Foucault, 1977a, 1978a, 1980). In what follows relations of power, as referred to above, are understood in Foucauldian terms. That is, power is not simply about repression, censorship or concealment but is the constitutive effect of a field of knowledge that “produces reality, produces domains of objects and rituals of Truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production” (Foucault, 1977a: 194). Thus power relations are understood as being intricately linked to knowledge in terms of how the substances of society and of individuals are collectively knowledged-into-being in certain ways and thereby regulated; a power-knowledge that moulds ‘psychologies’ and regulates couple-conduct as it installs particular forms of self-awareness and identities (see Foucault, 1980) into the governed soul of the ‘private’ self (Rose, 1989).

Hence the discursive domain of coupledom refers to a particular, regimented, and socio-historic formation of power-knowledge; a discursively constituted metaphorical and material space consisting of various couple practices and qualities (such as exclusivity, commitment, trust, love and intimacy) wherein partnerships and partners are produced and realised but also governed and disciplined in accordance with the assumed truths of that domain. The ‘domain of coupledom’ as a specific body of knowledge and set of practices is established as various discourses – the romantic, economic, biological, and psychological discourses, for example, converge to delineate the domain and produce the ‘reality’ of the couple. As the unit of analysis, the ‘couple’ is broadly conceived as a committed sexual and emotional arrangement, or ‘bonded’ relationship, that is legally sanctioned by marriage or not, that is
either cross or same sex, is sexually and/or emotionally monogamous or non-monogamous, and which involves co-habitation or not. In this inclusion of various contemporary forms of partnership the wider domain of contemporary coupledom is brought into view so as to draw up more comprehensively its complex web of intersecting knowledges, resistances, lines of truth, and relations of power.

In particular, this research explores (a) the discursive production of, and (b) the function of the power-knowledge of coupledom as manifest across various relational contexts. The discursive production of the experiences in question relates to ways in which it is variously and multiply produced as a specific field of knowledge and practice. In this the rationales, meanings and formations of coupledom are explored and questioned as a socio-historic, contingent knowledge that cannot be assessed in relation to a notion of ‘objective truth’ because from a post-structuralist perspective such a relation is mere empiricist fantasy (Sarup, 1988). An exploration of function involves an analysis of coupledom as a regulated, regulating, and politically charged domain that induces a particular relation to ourselves and others and that serves as an effective transfer point for disciplinary power that, as will be seen, has potent effects on who we are and what we see ourselves as doing in being paired.

The purpose of this research, then, is to re-examine socially valued ways of being coupled that are aspired to as a matter of personal health, maturity, and a secure well-being (see, for example, Fromm, 1957; Rogers, 1973; Branden, 1981; Hazan and Shaver, 1987; cf. Stenner and Watts, 1998). Not, as I say, to render the practice redundant but to re-assess some of the claims, modes of thought, and common assumptions that are manifested and reproduced across various relational contexts. The assumptive truth claims that concern me in particular are those pertaining to couple relationships (conventional or alternative) as a primary site for understanding ourselves, our authenticities, capacities, potential and pleasures and as feeding psychological ‘needs’ and allaying ‘fears’. I target assumptions about what it means to be an ‘authentic’ and ‘contained’ individual living ‘authentic’ and ‘contained’ partnerships, and what these authenticities and containments produce and occlude in the service of a social, political and economic order that depends on a series of fictional dichotomies and opposing spaces for its continued existence and legitimacy. Claims about what it means to be ‘satisfied’ in ‘stable’ couple relationships according to psychological judgement (the discipline’s and our own) are critiqued as ensuring a regulatory subjective containment and totalising social order.
The ‘security’, ‘trust’, ‘intimacy’ and ‘order’, for example, that couple relationships are meant to provide, and what these require of the disciplined, self-regulating subject, are similarly critiqued as relations of power: a power that enables one kind of experience while delimiting other possibilities. Also challenged are assumptions about coupledom being a separate ‘private’ zone wherein we are ‘free’ to grow as ‘mature’ individuals, enact choice, manage our own relationships, and determine our own futures. In this the specific mode of government (Foucault, 1978b; Rose, 1989, 1999; an understanding of which I explain below) that prioritises and is facilitated by the various ‘freedoms’ and ‘qualities’ of coupledom is explored.

In summation, I shall be arguing throughout that these kinds of values, qualities, and truth claims are productive not so much of personal and relational ‘freedoms’, ‘well-being’ or ‘success’ but actively constitute and regulate relationships and selves. I argue that the knowledge of coupledom doesn’t reside in the thing-in-itself, that it cannot be ‘objectively’ revealed through an empiricist examination and measurement of its ‘identified’ properties and processes. Rather it is proposed that the current knowledge-practice of coupledom emerges from a series of historic, political and socio-economic conditions and a particular ordering of Truth that operates on the couple domain, its knowledges and ‘realities’, and on the psychologies and conduct of its people. Accordingly, mainstream psychology is critiqued as a field of disciplinary knowledge that is itself “disciplined in relation to certain practices and problems of government, is dependent for its epistemology on certain institutional forms and regimes of judgement in relation to human conduct, and [functions] as that ‘know-how’ which makes certain ‘power effects possible’” (Rose, 1996a: 18). In contrast to the empiricism of traditional psychology, the theoretical paradigm I adopt questions the discoverability of ‘truth’ and promotes the view that language (ways of talking and doing) is not a transparent medium through which we can know ‘reality’ but that language is constructive of ‘reality’ (Henriques et al, 1984; Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Parker, 1989; Shotter and Gergen, 1989). And so it is the ways in which people across a range of relationship types talk about the phenomenon of coupledom that serves as the basis of this research.
1.2 Why it’s being done

The following extracts represent a sample of what people who were interviewed about their couple relationships had to say on the subject.

Ken: So um, I was certainly ready to um, settle down I guess with the right person. And that’s the way it has turned out.

Geraldine: I’m very scared of commitment. I’m deathly afraid of commitment and that’s why I can’t, I get nowhere. (Giggles) I can’t commit to, the thought of marriage is terrifying. The thought of being in love is even worse.

Angela: I just don’t think there’s anything quite as strong and as sacred as a bond between two individuals. As soon as another person’s involved it gets mixed up and spread out and it’s just different.

Brian: And my whole idea of relationships is um, being together, working through life together and all that sort of thing […] I’m in a relationship because I want to experience my life with someone else. I don’t want to do it by myself.

Adam: Those who are fortunate enough to be in relationships in some ways are envied by all those who are not.

Tyler: So with the monogamy thing, I think that a lot of us {polyamorists and polyfidelitists} are actually handling our three-sided relationships as a series of one-to-one relationships, […] taking a lot from the monogamous culture and applying it, making it fit. Sort of hammering it ‘til it fits into place.

Rodney: I think a successful relationship probably stems from just being honest with each other […] Um, setting limits. Knowing your limits.

Annette: Security is important to me. And to make that other person feel secure.

Rebecca: And I don’t think any of those other strands in your life {such as employment or a social life} can give you that, um, or with me, can give you that security and comfort to make sure that the other things in your life work. So yeah, a relationship’s really important like that.

Allan: I think when two people enter into a relationship it’s on the understanding that it’s gonna be a one-on-one.

Ryan: A successful gay relationship should be no different to a heterosexual couple really.

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1 See page iv for transcription symbols code.
What is being said here reflects but some of the truth claims of coupledom that permeate everyday talk and social scientific theory. In these examples procured from a variety of relationship types and subject positions (monogamous, non-monogamous, heterosexual, bisexual and homosexual) some of the truisms and tendencies of coupledom are spoken of as ‘settling down with the right person’ as a mark of maturity, the ‘sacredness’ of the ‘envied’ dyadic bond, the obligation of ‘security’, as making ‘alternative’ relationships fit the monogamous model, through to the heterosexist criteria for relational ‘success’. These are representative of some of the conceptions and claims that motivate and drive the critical perspective taken up in this research.

To briefly reflect on the motivations for this work and sketch its background, most of my relational life I have wondered about the privilege of coupledom that takes on a certain status and value according to intensifications of love, exclusivity, intimacy, commitment and trust, for example, and which demarcate this relationship as somehow more meaningful than others. I had always been cautious of the ‘settle down’ ideal yet also believed in ‘the one’ and was keen to resolve this personal tension and make my relationships ‘work’ according to a culturally shared know-how as formalised by the psy-disciplines. I was curious about the practice of serial monogamy wherein it seems necessary to dilute the emotional and sexual significance of one relationship before entering another. Similarly I was curious about the non-monogamous relationships of others and wondered whether this kind of couple-bond may be different from a monogamous one and perhaps in some ways ‘better’. I envied such relationships and was interested in the emotional and sexual freedoms I assumed to be involved.

Out of such curiosities the psychology of interpersonal attraction and of close relationships were the first topics that attracted me as an undergraduate. However, I soon grew confused by psychology’s peddling of the autonomous and stable ‘self’ that is simultaneously supposed to find and lose itself in an intimate relationship. Was I to ‘love myself’ first or was this a consequence of partnership? I was left despondent when I read psychological literature on romantic relationships because I either did not see my own experience reflected or felt inadequate because my relationship didn’t seem to quite match up to the accepted criteria of ‘success’. Was such a perceived inadequacy really to do with my mother and childhood? I grew concerned for the ‘single’ person who apparently cannot know fulfilment, comfort, or
security in their ‘solitary and unattached’ state. I felt uncomfortable with the pathologisation of those who do not commit or become intimately entwined in ‘appropriate’ ways as being somehow phobic, maladjusted, or immature. And I was similarly uncomfortable with the status of the heterosexual, Western model for couple relationships and its assumptions of a ‘reality’ that was mine to aspire to and embrace else I live a partial existence and know an inauthentic future. In short, I was (and remain) troubled by a theoretical and cultural knowledge of the couple relationship in terms of its ideals, warrants, privileges and rhetoric such as those articulated in some of the above extracts and reflected again in the following text.

“I believe that the primary purpose of relationship is to allow two people to be connected to each other through intimacy, so that each gets support from the other to ease the burdens of life and to enhance the enjoyment of living. The maturity level we need to maintain a healthy relationship is reflected by having a sense of self-esteem, the ability to set boundaries, a good sense of self, improved self-care, and the ability to share who we are moderately (and in appropriate ways and at appropriate times) with our partners.”

(Mellody, 1992: 116)

This is but one example of many texts (academic, self-help and otherwise) that similarly celebrate the worthiness of being coupled as a matter of life satisfaction and well-being. This is a knowledge and series of truth claims that produce and authorise notions of dyadic connection and an intimacy that allegedly helps us to achieve this. It involves ideas of relational ‘health’ and personal ‘maturity’, of coupledom as the prime vehicle for security, self-care and self-esteem. It involves assumptions about an enhanced life of eased burdens and speaks of levels, ability, and that which is ‘good’. Here the purpose and benefits of romantic partnership are articulated while mention is made of moderation, boundaries, and what is appropriate. It is this kind of authorised and authorising knowledge, its prescriptions and assumed truths, that should, I suggest, be of ultimate concern to us as we strive to make ourselves intelligible in this knowledge and live out this bounded intelligibility in our ‘healthy’, ‘moderate’ and ‘appropriate’ couple relationships.

On the basis of a constructed coupledom that is spoken of as an experience or way of being-in-the-world that can transport us from one (unattached) state to another (a state of attachment) it becomes necessary to consider how, and on what terms, these various
hierarchical states are demarcated. What do these fictions of truth require of the coupled-subject and inter-subjectivity in terms of how we are obliged to relate to ourselves and others as ‘mature’ and ‘esteemed’ people in ‘healthy’ relationships? What do we see ourselves as being saved from in our domesticities? And how does this impact on how we live them? As a primary model for the organisation of the social realm and personal lives what are the constitutive arrangements and relations of power that coupledom sets up and what does it delimit? What presuppositions about the nature of human beings are embodied in the kinds of values and technologies Mellody and others advise, and in what ways do these enable people to be governed and regulate themselves? In this quotation, the subject is endowed with an entitlement to personal fulfilment and happiness but it is the disciplinary power involved in “the idea of the ‘pursuit of happiness’ which might demand our attention” (Evans, 2003: 55) as opposed to devising a recipe for how we can best achieve it in ‘successful’ and ‘stable’ loving partnerships.

This kind of questioning, I believe, is becoming increasingly necessary as the self-professed ‘civil engineers’ of psychology (Stainton Rogers, Stenner, Gleeson and Stainton Rogers, 1995) since the early 1980s have embarked on the formulisation of a ‘new science of relationships’ to increase the knowledge, predictability and stability of socially valued relationships, particularly of family and marriage (see Kelley et al, 1983; Berscheid, 1999; Reis et al, 2000). While psychological theories on romantic relationships existed before the 1980s, from this period onwards relationship theorists such as Harold Kelley made it clear that there was a need to replace everyday notions of personal relationships with scientific ones. The point of this, argued Kelley, was “to gain an understanding of such relationships that will make possible their systematic assessment and classification and provide a basis for interventions to improve their functioning” (Kelley, 1979: 1). Through investigating the consistent patterns and systematic ‘laws’ of close relationships, by understanding the cumulative effects that relationships had on people’s psychology and behaviour, the thrust of this new science of relationships was that by understanding relationships at the micro level, ways in which the individual interacts with society could be intervened in and effectively governed. “If the frequent and intense events of any stable personal relationship are consistently patterned”, says Kelley (1986: 9), “it has great psychological significance for the development and stability or change of the individuals.”
Thus scientific attention to ‘consistent’ and ‘stable’ relationship patterns during the 1980s (and beyond) can be seen as being operationalised as a means of monitoring people, of modifying needs and wants, and of predicting behaviours such as “how people will attempt to gain and use various economic resources, whether and how they will vote, whether and how they will take to the streets in public demonstrations, and so on” (Kelley, 1986: 6). A new science of relationships, it seemed, could procure and offer knowledge of people in relationships not only to improve their functioning but as a form of social engineering that reflects the late twentieth and early twenty-first century neo-liberal administration of the micro-moral relations between people (Rose, 1999), as discussed below. In this the early 1980s does appear to mark the consolidation of an empirical focus away from the wider society and the psychology of the group (e.g. Schachter and Singer, 1962) to the processes of a ‘newly discovered’ intimate territory which is to be made more visible as experts attempt to investigate, classify and mediate the features and processes of personal relationships, predict dyadic relational patterns, and intervene in the micro-moral relations among people.

When prominent relationship theorist Ellen Berscheid, for example, envisions “that very special morning when, at long last, we can truly see the green of a science of ‘relationships’” (Berscheid, 1999: 265), she is proposing an increased visibility of human behaviour in intimate relationships while advocating a need for scientific and political intervention. For Berscheid, this new science of relationships, her ‘flag of a higher truth’, and this ‘newest and greatest challenge’ to the socio-behavioural sciences, as she puts it, will more effectively “inform issues of national concern” (ibid.: 261) as it seeks to ‘discover’ the ‘laws’ that influence and govern people’s behaviour in relationships. As the vision and agenda of this new frontier of psychology gains momentum in a neo-liberal mode of governance (see section 1.3 and chapter six) it is becoming increasingly necessary to challenge the ‘laws’ and ‘norms’ of coupledom that are being prescribed in the scientific ‘discovery’ of them. The driving motivation of this current research, then, is to pose such a challenge to the ripening of a new science of relationships that seeks to facilitate the governance of people and relationships in the name of authorised knowledge and through the discovery of yet uncovered ‘truth’. In holding to the belief that being romantically paired represents some central part of being human, as these new relationships theorists do, as couples we are not free or somehow complete in our ‘humanity’ so much as regulated by it. Coupledom, I argue, as a tale of humanity and freedom, and as a support for a complex political apparatus,
can be re-told as a tale of governance, not least of which is the governance we act on ourselves as we play out our constructed versions of humanity, freedom, stability and togetherness.

1.3 A matter of ‘freedom’ and governance

Historical, philosophical and social scientific treatments of love and the couple relationship generally serve up a simplistic and progressivist narrative that tells of a continuous and gradual move from moral regulation to the liberated, intimate couple relationship of ‘modernity’ whether same or opposite sex (e.g. Giddens, 1992; Weeks, 2000; Weeks et al, 2001; Armstrong, 2003). Indeed, sociological and psychological accounts of loving partnership dating from the 1970s to the present (e.g. Constantine and Constantine, 1973; Rogers, 1973; Evans, 2003; and as above) have, to varying degrees, largely accepted a simplistic replacement of marital ‘tradition’ with individual ‘freedom’, or of ‘regulation’ with versions of ‘liberation’. However, as Foucault (1978a) suggests of sexuality, rather than the often inferred steady progression towards the ‘modern’ couple arrangement, or an unproblematic march towards the ‘freedom’ of personal expression in relationships, there can be detected a series of readjustments and tightened regulations that amount not to the evolution of the ‘liberated’ couple, but the murky co-existence of both regulation and ostensible liberation (of power and resistance) with the latter often giving rise to new techniques of regulation (Kitzinger, 1987, 1989; Butler, 1990; Stainton Rogers and Stainton Rogers, 2001).

In adopting a Nietzschean/Foucauldian perspective by suggesting that contemporary society has not been arrived at via simple progression from regulation to liberation, nor via “some kind of historic pendulum that swings between the two”, Stainton Rogers and Stainton Rogers (2001: 98) caution that we should not be beguiled into seeing the liberating ‘progression’ of time as a simple, single force running through history and social change. In short, theorisations of the liberated couples of ‘modernity’ obscure the workings of a “more devious and discreet form of power” (Foucault, 1978a: 11) that deploys personal ‘freedom’ as a strategy in the regulation of selves and intimate relations (Foucault, 1978b). The rise and historic re-configurations of romantic love is a pertinent example of how ‘love’ (and its ostensible freedoms) as one technology of coupledom “serves as a support or relay for
Chapter One

multiple strategies of intervention into human action, experience and relationships”; one that “both justifies such interventions and, by virtue of the intelligibility which it provides, how it [transforms] the subject-object of intervention into a calculable and navigable being” (Kendall and Crossley, 1996: 179). By this we can take Kendall and Crossley to mean that a knowledge of ‘love’ - itself diffuse, multiple and never settled (Stenner and Watts, 1998) – needs to be examined in light of the power relations (relations that include historic and current forms of resistance) that make it possible rather than in terms of some abstract and totalising notion of love as a ‘natural’ human capacity.

Notions of personal freedom are historically intertwined with conceptions and practices of love (Rose, 1989), but ways in which we ‘love’ and ‘desire’, as well as ways in which these have over time been challenged and re-configured in various moves of resistance, have also been deployed as strategies in the governance of personal and emotional lives (Deleuze and Guattari, 1977; Foucault, 1978a, 1985; Rose, 1989; 1999). The near-monolithic rise of romantic love (La cortezia) that first appeared in southern France in the twelfth century (De Rougemont, 2003) was itself a radical reaction to the then traditional marriages of moral duty as drawn up by the church and state, although such a love was not without its own set of behavioural codes and constitutive rules (Stendhal, 1975). While Western European marriage at the time was certainly a sacrament, it linked not two persons in ‘love’, but two inheritances, families, clans and procreators in a connection of moral duty that was authorised by church and state. (De Rougemont, 1983, 2003; cf. Stone, 1977; MacFarlane, 1987). With the poetry of the troubadours came a love “that was almost religious and smelling of heresy” (De Rougemont, 2003: 98) and which was not respectful of moral duty, feudal marriage or contractual social ties (ibid.). Essentially it seemed to worship women and passion as the symbols of salvation over and above the divine (De Rougemont, 1983, 2003). The church’s response to this attack on morals, reason and the social order was not to simply oppress the heresy and socio-moral subversiveness of romantic love (at least as manifest in medieval literature) but to capture the newly ‘unearthed’ capacity for passion and desire and reinterpret it as ‘love of the divine’ (ibid.). Thus ‘romantic love’ was from this point reworked as divinely inspired ‘symbiotic union’ and confined to the sanctity of marriage (Charles, 2002; De Rougemont, 2003). The challenge that a subversive romantic love had initially posed to marriages of economic exchange and the social order these perpetuated (Stone, 1977) came to be resolved when Western society based marriage itself on love, a
bourgeois custom that has arguably reigned since the eighteenth century (Shorter, 1975; Stone, 1977; see Stearns and Stearns, 1988, for counter arguments). In this absorption and redefinition of romantic love by thirteenth century powers of authority and the subsequent re-constitution of marriage as an act of ‘love’, the exercise of power can be understood as being not antithetical to acts of resistance but rather seen in terms of the resistances they “generate, confront, ‘manage’ or even promote” (Knights and Vurdubakis, 1994: 179; cf. Foucault, 1977a, 1983; Minson, 1986).

The concept of a rebellious ‘love’ that emerged from the romance of the twelfth century, then absorbed, tamed and sanctified by the Christian church and state authority of the thirteenth century (Stone, 1977; De Rougemont, 1983, 2003) as a matter of governance, was to be thoroughly psychologised and domesticated in the twentieth century with Bowlby’s theory of mother-child attachment and its notions of ‘bonds of love’ and ‘safe havens’ (Rose, 1989; see chapter two). The twelfth century freedoms of a savage, spontaneous and sentimental romantic passion which could conquer the shackles of moral, matrimonial and feudal law (De Rougemont, 2003) had given way to the responsible pursuit of ‘stability’ and ‘security’ in relationships that since the seventeenth century came to represent, in secular terms, a freedom and salvation no longer based on moral and spiritual revolution but gained through self-control, predictability, submission to social duty and state authority, and a mastery over liberalist (and Christian) determinations of what was strange, primitive, dangerous, and necessarily avoided (Foucault, 1978a, 1985). With Enlightenment conceptions of the ‘social contract’ (see Lessnoff, 1990) the experience of the conjugal relationship, as one form of contracted relationship, began to be regulated in certain (secular) ways as the nature, characteristics, motivations, wills, desires and interests of people were increasingly configured as a matter of and for government (Rose, 1989), one that fostered an altogether different notion of ‘freedom’ from the spontaneous freedoms of the heart that are said to have been favoured in the construction of twelfth century romance (De Rougemont, 2003). It is thus the form of government that occurs as the experience of loving coupledom is cut up in certain ways, as new lines of intensities, desires, and powers of freedom are drawn around up around this, and as people are objectified as the subjects of liberal government (assigned rights and duties as ‘responsible’ citizens) that serve as a prime basis for this critical analysis of coupledom as a governed domain that is regulated, for example, by the political

A fundamental theme of Foucauldian theory, one that is closely aligned with his conceptualisation of the power-knowledge axis (as detailed in chapter three), is that of governmentality or ways in which ‘government’ has been theorised and practiced at various times since the fifteenth century (see Foucault, 1978b). For Foucault, ‘government’ is a practice or series of practices that is activated and justified by a specific political rationality or ethos (Gordon, 1980); a rationality that is more than just ideology but one which actively “constitutes a part of the fabric of our ways of thinking about and acting upon one another and ourselves” (Barry et al, 1996: 7). It is “understood in the broad sense as techniques and procedures for directing human behaviour” (Foucault, 1997: 81) whether it be the government of children, of souls, conscience, love, households, or of oneself. But for Foucault the problem of the ‘governability’ of society and individuals is not a problem of simple dominance by an authoritative sovereign, church or state, or of the reduction of freedom but of a politics of lifestyle particularly as shaped by the political rationality of liberalism and more lately by a neo-liberalism that adopts ‘freedom’ as a formula of rule (Foucault, 1978b; Gordon et al, 1991; Barry et al, 1996; Rose, 1989, 1999).

Government in this ‘politics of lifestyle’, as opposed to enforcing mere conformity to external law and moralised social norms, operates in the ways we understand ourselves, in the ways we speak the ‘truth’ of ourselves, in the various programmes, procedures, and technologies that are assembled as the means by which we govern ourselves and each other as we pursue the ‘freedoms’ of love, personal security, fulfilment and happiness (Foucault, 1978b; Barry et al, 1996; Rose, 1989, 1999). Government exists as a modality of power not only between a government body and a population but in a relationship between two persons as well as in the relationship one has to oneself, to life, and to being ‘human’. Particularly since the eighteenth century, according to Foucault (1978b), liberal government operates by presupposing the freedom of the governed, by instrumentalising the forces that shape personal actions and processes in desired directions whether in schools, clinics, offices or bedrooms. As the rationality of government shifted from sovereign rule (while not altogether replacing it) to a concern for the details of personal lives, more subtle forms of discipline were mobilised so that individuals would responsibly regulate themselves and
government be seen to operate from a distance (Foucault, 1977a, 1978b; Rose, 1989, 1999). In this, couple relationships moved from being represented and regulated not merely as a matter of obligation and conformity to moral authority and prohibitions, as they had been from at least the thirteenth century, but as a lifestyle decision that warranted the enactment of an equally coercive ethical code (Foucault, 1985, 1986).

It is in a liberalist ethos of government as partly framed by the social contract theory of Hobbes in the mid seventeenth century, and developed thereafter by Rousseau, Locke and Kant (see Lessnoff, 1990) that a government of freedom (or ‘responsible’ liberty) was formalised (Nietzsche, 1887a; Foucault, 1978b). This is a style of government that confronted an industrial society with a politics of individualism, social order and security and that was interested in the economisation of resources and effort, the minute detail of its citizens and the government of souls (Rose, 1989) in an effort to achieve its ends. In his later work beginning with the first volume of the History of Sexuality, Foucault considers liberal forms of freedom (the right of the autonomous, responsible individual to live comfortably and securely in a civil society in which state intervention is minimised) as being dependent on the exercise of discipline and a certain form of rule “wherein ‘freedom’ becomes a resource for, and not merely a hindrance to, government” (Barry et al, 1996: 8) as was the case with the subversive freedoms of romantic love as it first manifested (De Rougemont, 1983, 2003). In a liberal society, and intensified in the neo-liberalism (or advanced liberalism) of post Second World War Europe and America (see chapter six), individuals and relationships were (and are) governed through ‘freedom’ in that liberalism “sought to invent the [socio-economic] conditions in which subjects themselves would enact the responsibilities that composed their liberties” (Rose, 1999: 72). Thus freedom and discipline are enmeshed by, and for, this political reasoning and freedom is deployed as the means of rule. And the assumed freedoms, stabilities, and authenticities said to be gained in a ‘well-managed’ couple relationship are very much imbricated in this style of government that regards healthy marriages and strong families as a ‘nation’s greatest asset’.

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A recent and pertinent example of governmental intervention into couple relationships in the name of personal freedom can be found in a booklet distributed to Australian Homes mid 2004. The booklet offers information to young people, parents and the community on identifying and avoiding abusive and violent relationships and where to find help. In his introduction the Australian Prime Minister, John Howard, asserts that “good relationships make a great community” and that “it is not the role of government to tell people how to live their lives – relationships are personal and private” (page 1). Yet by way of alerting the public to the problems of domestic and sexual violence - the need for which I am not disputing - this widely distributed information involves a series of affirmations (and personal stories ‘based on people’s real life experiences’) pertaining to ‘healthy’, ‘fulfilling’ and ‘successful’ couple relationships, what their purpose is, what they should involve, and how they should function.

In line with psychological expertise and cultural understanding, the booklet affirms that relationships consist of ‘fundamental values’ such as good communication, affection, trust, honesty, independence, and security – values “which we all need to understand and encourage” (page 16) for the sake of ourselves and society as if these values are universal, timeless and somehow redemptive. Parents are encouraged to look for signs of maladjustment in their children, primarily daughters, and people are encouraged to talk openly to various authorities about their experiences as a way of taking responsibility for themselves. Beyond possibly countering the targeted problem, what can be seen as occurring here is that the ruling formula of ‘freedom’ (in this case a freedom of security, confidence and self-esteem in a ‘strong’ relationship) is being used as a justification for inciting an array of mutual and self examinations and for eliciting the confession of minute personal details as we take ‘responsibility’ and speak the truth of ourselves to, and with the help of, experts.

This kind of critical analysis of a (neo)liberalist approach to government that authorises such scrutiny of ourselves and our relationships so that we are ‘strong’ enough to “face the world with confidence” (page 4) and that assists with the therapeutic nurture of minds, bodies and souls is, I believe, crucial for a contextualised understanding of contemporary coupledom as a political and economically infused ‘private’ arrangement that represents individual freedom,

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3 The booklet is entitled Violence against women: Australia says no (2004) and complements a nationally launched media campaign designed to raise awareness of violent and abusive relationships and combat domestic and family violence and sexual assault in Australia.
personal welfare and security but which in doing so functions as a technique and procedure for directing and regulating behaviour, selves, and inter-subjectivity in accordance with unquestioned values. As such it becomes necessary to ask, as I do in the four analyses that follow, what these values and qualities require of the couple and of coupled subjects and to consider ways in which they make the disciplined individual visible and governable in particular ways.

1.4 A tale of opposing territories

The esteemed values, freedoms, and obligations of contemporary coupledom, then, can be seen as being significantly warranted and as taking shape against the conditions laid out by a liberal practice of government as it justifies itself as a counter to insecurity, danger and destruction; as a form of rule, no less, that saves humankind from the disadvantages of chaos and from itself. With the advent of Hobbesian social contract theory and its subsequent configurations in the eighteenth century, that which we are supposed to be ‘free’ from when agreeing to enter the social contract and accept the rights and obligations afforded us by civil society is made explicit (Nietzsche, 1887a). In its fiction of a primitive, savage, and fearing humanity that social contract theory presents as pre-existing the civilising contract, the psychologised need for the security of a permanent, trusting, bonded, intimate, and stable relationship is also fictioned into being, or at least configured and justified in new ways (Rose, 1989). In other words, the various suppositions about the terrifying nature of disconnected, isolated, uncertain human beings prior to ‘civilisation’ provide the conditions for conceptions of the unities, bonds, securities and comforts of society in a Hobbesian social contract and hence of the contracted couple relationship. The dichotomisation between the totalised territories of primitive-civil, savagery-security, fearful-happy, isolated-connected, single-coupled, and so on, set up the possibility for the technologies that will enable the free, responsible individual to be both governed and self-regulate lest one fall from the grace of a relationship (and civility, happiness, security, connectedness) and descend (again) into the chaos of violence, isolation, disconnection, and loneliness – a subjective state that is typically theorised as involving “chronic distress without redeeming features” (Moustakas, 1972: 15) or as the “absence of positive emotions such as happiness and
So when Fromm (1957: 14) asserts that “the deepest need of man [sic] is the need to overcome his separateness, to leave the prison of his aloneness”, in the assumption that we are transported and saved from an imprisoning state of fear and isolation to a state of connected freedom in the correct practice of an ‘art of loving’ and strong relationships, we can discern a knowledge of coupledom that is predicated on the fiction of oppositional and hierarchical domains and experiences: dichotomised ways of being in the world. We can discern the political context behind the warrant for a well-managed ‘loving’ whereby we are effectively disciplined and according to which we can self-regulate as if fulfilling some ‘deep need’. That we are said to overcome a confining isolation in being paired echoes the Hobbesian description of ‘primitive man’ marching out of separateness and fear into the ‘freedom’ of civility, connectedness, and well being. Indeed “the notion that people begin as separate individuals, who then march out and connect themselves with others, is one of the most dazzling bits of self-mystification in the history of the species” (Slater, cited in Stone, 1977: 425). And this self-mystification is indeed dazzling because as a dominant system of (fictioned) thought it functions as truth (Foucault, 1977c), permeates psychosocial theory and cultural belief, and in so doing dichotomises the individual and society while prescribing how we relate to ourselves and others and facilitating the governance of these. Thus when recent psychological theory premises the couple relationship on the same idea that people have a ‘fundamental and natural need’ to connect with each other in connections that are called ‘relationships’ (Hendrick, 2004; see also Baumeister and Leary, 1995), we must be cautious of the pervasive liberalist fiction of opposing domains – the individual and society, the primitive and the civil, the lonely and the connected – that enables such a claim to be made. It is not that I am devaluing the disadvantages of ‘isolation’ as such, but I am questioning the fact that coupledom is still seen as the only acceptable alternative and ‘solution’ to an invented problem.

The point I wish to make clear is that coupledom as a demarcated domain that is warranted and privileged as the place to know a secure, comfortable, ordered and complete existence is

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4 See also the edited volume of Peplau and Perlman (1982) for a compilation of traditional and more critical approaches to the constructs of loneliness and isolation.
a way of thinking that is politically fashioned, economically useful, and psychologically reified. From the assumptions of the social contract that recur in rationalist and moral philosophy, Freudian theory and current conceptions of romantic attachment, the couple domain and its qualities are reified because a place of fear, absence, danger, and threat is first construed so that we embrace all that is ‘good’ as a matter of personal freedom. But, as argued, that which is ‘good’ – primarily the values of freedom and a stabilising order - are historically tied to an ethos of government that uses freedom as a formula of rule and which depends on the alleged ‘truth’ of human needs and desire to perpetuate itself while being seen to not intervene in how we live our ‘private’ lives. As argued in subsequent chapters, what it means to be ‘secure’, ‘comfortable’, ‘free’ and ‘complete’ in oneself and in a couple relationship are not without clear prescriptions, obligations, and disciplines – all of which involve relations of power. And the ‘know-how’ and humaneering spirit of psychology (Stainton Rogers et al, 1995) are always ready at hand to help us in our ‘failings’ and remind us of our ‘human needs’ so that we remain fully-fledged citizens of the happy couple domain but in which we are no less than constituted and governed in our assumed needs, securities, capabilities and happiness.

On this basis I argue that coupledom is not simply a domain of humanity which contains its own inherent ‘truth’ and ‘nature’ but is a fictioned territory made possible by the construction and interaction of various truths, the mobilisation of an entire set of knowledges, and by the discursive construction of dichotomised terrains that centre around the related principle dualisms of inside-outside, presence-absence, authenticity-inauthenticity, and order-chaos. Coupledom becomes a privileged knowledge, practice and experience because of what is believed to exist ‘outside’ of its borders and which it supposedly offers protection from. The recorded meaning of the term ‘coupledom’ as “the state of living as a couple especially when regarded as being interested in another to the exclusion of the outside world” (Collins English Dictionary, 2000) alludes to its dependency on that which is excluded and absented in a metaphorical illusion of opposing worlds. The alleged dangers and loneliness of not being connected or paired (see Fromm-Reichmann, 1959; Weiss, 1973; Bowlby, 1978; Rubenstein and Shaver, 1982) is an example of a constructed ‘truth’ that does not exist apart from the couple domain but in fact provides coupledom its warrant; lending it meaning, endowing it with value, and fortifying it as an escape from chaos, uncertainty and fear. In this, what it is to be coupled or unattached (or similarly ‘inside or outside’, ‘authentic
or inauthentic’) are always and already signifying each other each in a continuous deflection of meaning and are, therefore, not mutually exclusive, divisible realms of experience (Derrida, 1976; Deleuze and Guattari, 1977; Butler, 1990; Widdicombe, 1993; Reynolds and Wetherell, 2003).

Hence the knowledged practice of coupledom depends on the fiction of what it is not for its character and truth status. And what coupledom is ‘not’ is explicitly framed by the discourse of a pathological loneliness that props up conventional ideas about what coupledom is assumed to be – the absence of fear, distress, ill health, danger, affliction, emptiness, and so on (see Weiss, 1973; Berscheid, 1999). In introducing her manual for a more ‘satisfying’ couple experience, Hendrick (2004: 9) purports that “if people did not have a fundamental need to belong, loneliness, as we know it, would not exist.” But we can turn this truth claim on its head by seeing a ‘need to belong’ as in fact being predicated on the enabling construction of loneliness. It is romantic coupledom that wouldn’t exist in ways that we know it if there was not already in place a facilitating knowledge of a chaotic and isolated ‘outside’ (see chapter five).

As discussed in chapter two, Bowlby’s influential theory of attachment and ‘bonds of love’ grew out of what he first thought about ‘separation anxiety’ and the ‘distress’ of isolation as he observed it in children. What was assumed to be ‘bad’ about separation determined what was assumed to be ‘good’ about attachment. In fact “it is around pathological children – the troublesome, the recalcitrant, the delinquent – that conceptions of normality have taken shape” (Rose, 1989: 133) with regard to the couple, the family unit and other social arrangements. To further illustrate, in his study of the making of ‘unity’ in American marriage between the 1700s and the 1950s, Hartog (2000) offers a critical legal history of married relationships, making the point that what we now see as being ‘good’ about marriage was determined by the activities of those seeking separation and divorce.

“It is through separation that we make sense of marriage in American law during the generations prior to our own. It is through separations, through close examination of struggles at the margins of marital life and marital identities, that we come to a historical understanding of core legal concepts: of wife, of husband, of unity.”

(Hartog, 2000: 1)
Hartog argues that the meaning and significance of the privatised and egalitarian ‘modern’ marriage was determined by the ‘presence of exit’ and the practice of divorce. His point is that legalised processes of separation *invented* marital rights and conjugal norms. As married couples sought to be legally separated, the ‘rights’ and ‘nature’ of contemporary marriage were established as battles were fought over alimony, child custody and the legal/economic independence of women, for example. Prompted by such battles and legal intervention, by the mid 1950s the contemporary narrative of marriage as a “private choice and as a collection of private practices” in which one could express one’s individuality and arrange commitments at will was consolidated (ibid.: 310). The point here is that questions concerning what it means to be married and coupled are not answered by the invocation of an evolving humanity or humanist philosophy (as relationship theorists in the 1960s and 1970s, and onwards, believed they could be) but by judicial reasoning about what it is to *not* be married and legally coupled. So coupledom, then, is not its own presence; it does not ‘evolve’ with the release of its ‘natural’ laws, essential properties and purpose but is defined as its boundaries and limits are tested and negotiated. It is, as further highlighted in the analyses of chapters five to seven, produced and valorised by a series of discursive and regulative grids that set up conceptual dichotomies and opposing metaphorical spaces. Thus the couple domain is not a segmented, self-contained space but is drawn up, indeed made possible, by a series of fabricated presences and absences and by the strategic manipulations, legal and otherwise, of ‘security’, ‘stability’ and ‘isolation’ and ‘separation’ in the political and economic production of social order.

1.5 Aims and structure of thesis

In viewing coupledom as a constitutive body of knowledge and set of regulating practices, in problematising it as a socio-historically specific regime of truth and relay for various forms of productive and disciplinary power, I am troubling coupledom as a compulsory organising matrix. As mentioned, this couple matrix is understood as a specific domain of power-knowledge, one that functions as a discursive mould in which the experience of romantic pairing is cast and shaped; as a grid-like array of interconnected circuits of knowability and productive power. As such, the principle of pairing is seen to organise and reproduce various kinds of compulsory arrangements and ‘realities’ around the ‘orders’ of stability, satisfaction, containment, certainty and authenticity, for example. In her provocative challenge to the
ostensible ‘naturalness’ of gender, sex and sexuality, Butler (1990) theorises what she terms the ‘heterosexual matrix’ as the productive and compulsory ordering of sex, gender and desire; as a conceptual and experiential mould that supports gender hierarchy and compulsory heterosexuality. Butler uses the term “to designate that grid of cultural intelligibility through which bodies, genders, and desires are naturalised” (ibid.: 151). I refer to a ‘couple matrix’ in much the same way but use the term to denominate a grid of intelligibility through which a system of dyadic pairing and a generalised experience of it is made compulsory and naturalised across gender and sexuality.

While gender and sexuality are without doubt significantly organised in and by the hetero-patriarchal couple matrix and the constructed ‘qualities’ of romantic partnership in both its conventional and ‘alternative’ figurations (Cancian, 1987; Kitzinger, 1987; Hollway, 1989, Wetherell, 1995; Dallos and Dallos, 1997; Weeks, 2000; Weeks et al, 2001), I do not emphasise these aspects as much as the organisation and subjectification of ‘human’ selves in couple relationships. This is not to suggest that we are ‘human’ without always and already being gendered and sexualised (at least in the way we understand being human). Versions of femininity and masculinity are, of course, always being (re)produced in the couple practices of romantic love (Cancian, 1987; Wetherell, 1985), trust (Stephenson et al, 2000), monogamy (Hollway, 1989; Rosa, 1994; Stelboum, 1999), jealousy (Stenner, 1993), and commitment (Hollway, 1989; Lawes, 1999), for instance. While certainly not exhausted in either aims, purpose or significance, there is already much feminist and critical research that explores ways in which gender and gender power relations are constituted in coupledom and/or romantic discourse (e.g. Atkinson, 1974; Firestone, 1979; Walkerdine and Lucey, 1989; Hollway, 1989; Stenner, 1993; Wetherell, 1995; Dallos and Dallos, 1997; Reynolds and Wetherell, 2003; Sandfield and Percy, 2003). But in what follows I aim for a broader perspective of subjectivity of which gender and sexuality are examples. By this I mean that my focus is not so much on the gendering of coupledom but on the various (other) ways in which subjects - whether masculine, feminine, straight, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer - are constituted and regulated as coupled subjects. So while the hetero-patriarchal constitutions of gender and sexuality in marriage and couple relationships are outlined in the literature review, these aspects of coupledom are not deconstructed in the following analyses to the degree they are in the feminist and critical research cited above, for example.
Concerning the structure of the thesis, chapter two consists of a critical survey of the psychological architecture of contemporary Western coupledom particularly with regards to the construct and measurements of relational ‘satisfaction’ as one criteria for ‘quality’ that is intricately tied to the other criteria of commitment, trust, love, intimacy, and passion (Fletcher et al., 2000). In this review of the social scientific, particularly psychological, constructions of the couple relationship and its primary values, components and qualities, the conventional positivistic paradigm is problematised as not offering an objective investigation of the ‘truth’ about relationships and couple identities but very much imbricated in how the ‘truth’ of these are produced and regulated. This critique of psychological literature from the 1930s to the present illustrates the need to research and theorise coupledom within a framework that accounts for its socio-cultural specificity, its discursively constituted meanings, and that does not simply understand the social and subjectifying arrangement of coupledom as an effect of human nature and individual capacity.

Chapter three details the alternative post-structuralist and Foucauldian approach adopted for this research. Fundamentally, a post-structuralist and qualitative perspective involves questioning the nature and productivity, that is, the power of empiricist knowledge and its discovery of the ‘truth’ of the world, of objects, events, experiences and identities. So in using a contextual, linguistic and interpretative methodology this research promotes the variability of ‘truth’ as opposed to an experimental and quantitative one that seeks to objectively reveal it. I am, therefore, privileging the discursive generation of knowledge, the multiplicity of meaning, and the constructive nature of the assumed ‘realities’ and ‘qualities’ of coupledom and its citizens. In constructing ‘reality’ in one way as opposed to another, discourses (that is, ways of talking about things that also create things) also establish certain power relations that are always and already tied to particular regimes of Truth (Foucault, 1972, 1977e, 1978a, 1980). In brief, a post-structuralist framework allows for an understanding of how productive power is always imbibed in social practices, in subjectivities and in the discursive formation of different forms of knowledge. In this chapter the aims, methodologies and procedures of the two studies carried out are detailed.

Chapter four constitutes the first analytic study. It involves an etymological analysis of some of the key concepts and practices of coupledom and builds a semantic history of the present
practice around this. Not concerned with the origin of words as an inference of ‘real’
meaning, this chapter is an enquiry into the changing vocabulary and the culturally shared
body of words and meanings that variously produce and demarcate the couple domain as
currently practised. It highlights ways in which the meanings of words and institutionalised
couple practices have been formed, altered, redefined and reinforced over time in
accordance with specific socio-political contexts and particular systems of thought. The
purpose of this analysis is to historically contextualise coupledom as a contingent body of
knowledge that is tied to a complexity of extending, fluctuating, and overlapping meanings,
and aims to lay critical ground for the discourse analysis that follows.

Chapters five to seven make up the second analytic study. These chapters involve the discursive
analysis of some of the principle themes, concepts, and systems of thought as introduced and
deconstructed in the etymological analysis, showing how they are deployed and reflected in
people’s everyday talk about couple relationships. Here I analyse the transcripts of interviews
that were conducted with heterosexual and with lesbian, gay and bisexual participants
practising a range of ‘conventional’ and ‘alternative’ relationships in an exploration of those
discourses and discursive practices that converge on the couple domain and its population to
produce the privileged experience of being romantically paired. Chapter five is about the
productive and centralising force of dyadic containment as privileged and (re)produced
across ‘monogamous’ and ‘non-monogamous’ relationships. Here the usual dichotomisation
of traditional and alternative partnerships is destabilised. Chapter six concerns the discursive
practices of couple-commitment and trust and addresses the power that is inherent in an
entitlement to promise futures and in the deployment of a trust that oversees their certainty
and ensures the regularity of the disciplined coupled subject. Chapter seven pertains to the
constitutive technologies and visibilities of couple-intimacy and associated modes of speech
as deployed in the enactment and regulation of an authenticity and regime of truth that binds
one to a particular relation to oneself and an-other.

After summarising these analyses, the concluding chapter will then draw together the
implications of the two studies for understanding the couple relationship, couple-subjectivity
and popularised resistance.
CHAPTER TWO

The psychological architecture of coupledom

“No psychological knowledge is a mere mechanical echo of its object. It is rather, like the knowledge of external nature, dependent on the forms that the knowing mind brings to it, and in which it takes up the data.”

Georg Simmel (1906: 442-3)

“It is the narrative which packages and thus, in some sense, creates and produces the identity and the desire, and, indeed, it is the narrative we adopt which defines the experience as one of these sorts of experiences and not some other kind.”

Margaret Wetherell (1995: 134)

2.1 Introduction

This critical review of traditional psychological theory and research into the couple relationship focuses on those relational qualities and practices that the discipline advances as constituting the ‘typical’ or ‘normal’ couple experience and that are routinely used to evaluate the ‘healthy’ and ‘successful’ couple relationship (Fletcher et al., 2000). In particular, I discuss the ‘qualities’ or ‘components’ of couple attachment, security, commitment, trust, and intimacy as predominant technologies that drive the ‘normal’ couple experience and prescribe normalised couple-subjectivities. In this the (gendered) psychologies of couple love, sex, and sexuality are also outlined. In all, I sketch the psychological ‘know-how’ of romantic relationships in both conventional and alternative contexts, and the production of a normalising and disciplinary knowledge via which we learn a language for relating to a significant other and ourselves and that makes certain power effects possible. Asking what kind of knowledges about couple relationships, and ourselves in them, have been produced in psychology’s endeavour to “foster mutually fulfilling, stable bonds” (Johnson and Lebow, 2000: 24), my discussion deals with research concerns and theory beginning from the late 1930s when the socio-political climates of Britain and America were ripe for scientific investigation into the precepts of ‘stable’ romantic attachments and ‘quality’ marriages.
My critique of the positivist paradigm, and of the constitution of the couple relationship within this, is both enabled and informed by the previous critiques of many new paradigm theorists working to deconstruct traditional social psychology and its generation of an ‘objective’ knowledge that purportedly represents natural Truth. The epistemological underpinning of the position I take in opposition to the positivism and empiricism of orthodox psychology is to be expounded in more detail in chapter three. In the meantime, this critical review of psychological research into the couple relationship and coupled subject lays ground for why an anti-positivist perspective is warranted. And so I begin with a brief outline of the positivist and empiricist conceptualisation of the couple relationship and the methodology used to investigate and thereby construct it.

2.2 Measurement, methods and ‘objective’ knowledge

Within mainstream psychology the ‘couple’ exists as the private, intimate, emotionally and sexually bonded, co-habiting, married and/or committed pair. The singular type of couple relationship investigated and affirmed is the traditional form of romantic, dyadic partnership, whether same or cross-sex, married or not. Empirical literature repeatedly affirms the attitudes and values of couples as preferring emotional and sexual exclusivity, permanence, certainty, and self-mutual fulfilment. Most of the data collected by quantitative research has attended to the attitudes, observed behaviours, values and aspirations of white, middle class, heterosexual college students of North America that are generally gauged in laboratories or by pre-formed attitude scales and questionnaires. It is the knowledge accrued from this specific subject pool that is used to formulate and substantiate psychology’s truth claims about romantic partnerships; why we form them, what we want from them, how they are understood and practiced, how satisfying they should be, what they consist of, and how they can best be maintained. In that the very term ‘romantic’ is typically used to ‘scientifically’ conceptualise and differentiate the couple from other kinds of personal relationships, what is being looked for and how results are interpreted are from the start shaped by a priori hetero-romanticised beliefs, customs and expectations (see Faderman, 1997).

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It was from the 1930s that the positivist paradigm came to dominate (social) psychology (Kitzinger, 1987).\(^2\) As Gergen (1978: 507-8) asserts:

“… social psychology has become unmistakably identified with the experimental method. For many this development has been welcomed and much effort has been devoted to sustaining its hegemony. Through experimentation one could move from sheer speculation to the level of empirical grounded theory…[I]t seemed possible to test ideas against reality and to accumulate a repository of fundamental knowledge. Inroads could also be made into the control of social phenomena.”

Put another way, the hegemonic positivist paradigm:

“… might be characterised by its idealization of experimental control and manipulation of variables and by its concern with the minutiae of research procedures, with quantification, measurement and statistical analysis…It assumes an objective knowable reality and is based on the empiricist epistemology that ‘true’ knowledge must be grounded in experience and observation.”

(Malson, 1998: 35).

To this can be added the further assumptions that scientific knowledge is universally applicable, that results of laboratory experiments can be generalised to people in social contexts, that apolitical, ahistorical (decontextualised) ‘objective’ knowledge is generated by the actual nature of the world, and that the individual as the prime mediator or harbinger of knowledge and experience is mechanistically “possessed of stable, internal, intra-psychic structures” (Stainton Rogers et al, 1995: 19) such as coherent, identifiable, and relatively static ‘selves’, ‘personalities’ and ‘attitudes’ (Henriques et al, 1984; Potter and Wetherell, 1987).

Psychological knowledge of romantic partnership has traditionally relied on the experimental (hypothetico-deductive) method and its empiricist assumptions concerning the discoverability and measurability of ‘objective’ truth. Quite remarkable is that the experimental (‘controlled’) manipulation of concepts or behaviours (or variables), such as levels of intimacy or satisfaction, assumes that hypotheses are tested with “no preconceived ideas about what we might find” (Hendrick, 2004: 11). This is as if researchers investigating close relationships are somehow separate from the experience being ‘scientifically’ tested and

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\(^2\) For comprehensive critical accounts of the history of the Psychological discipline and its research in general see Danziger (1990a), Rose (1985) and Richards (1996), and of social psychology, in particular, see Farr (1996) and Gergen (1973).
dangerously privileges them as the “sole architects of legitimate knowledge” (Stainton Rogers et al, 1995: 226) who are “extracting the gold of pure truth” (ibid.: 226) just waiting to be ‘discovered’ by the procurement of empirical data and the application of ‘objective’ scientific methods (e.g. Fletcher, 2002; cf. Hammersley, 1995). Closely aligned with experimentation are forms of psychometric testing where data is procured by pre-conceived questionnaires or scales of some kind, with responses measured and compared as a way of accessing the ‘truth’ of the concept, attitude, or behaviour under investigation (see Coolican, 1999).

In the field of personal relationships psychometric testing is rife and a plethora of scales have been invented in the pursuit of ‘objective’ knowledge and in the name of psychological expertise. For example, relational constructs and ‘qualities’ such as love, intimacy, trust, and commitment have been identified and measured using scales like the ‘Interaction Record Form for Intimacy’ (Prager and Buhrmester, 1998), the ‘Marital Adjustment Test’ (Locke and Wallace, 1959, and still in circulation), the ‘Dyadic Adjustment Scale’ (Spanier, 1976), the ‘Self-Disclosure Index’ (Miller et al, 1983), and the ‘Love and Liking Scale’ (Rubin, 1970), to list but a few. But the ‘truth’ or ‘reality’ conveyed by such measures must always be questioned as reflecting no more than the preconceived ideas of those who compile the questionnaires and scales. To cite Harré’s critique of the psychometric testing that is a fundamental basis of psychology’s truth claims regarding couple relationships, its nature and properties:

“The use of questionnaires with [a] limited range [of] questions … which effectively preclude elaborations and reinterpretations … means that the concepts deployed … are predetermined. The effect of this is to produce not a representation of the social world being studied, but the representation of the shadow cast upon the social world by the prior conceptual apparatus deployed by the person who constructed the questionnaire.”


In other words, the ‘truth’ apparently revealed by psychometrics or any other (quasi)experimental method is always and already situated in a social reality that itself is not independent from the historically specific systems of thought that determine that reality. In that researchers only have access to the same social reality or cultural knowledge as those they are investigating, no degree of objectivity or scientific expertise can claim a superior ability to
access a higher, uncontaminated, asocial ‘truth’ (see chapter three). And this is no less true of the empiricist use of self-report (interviews, behavioural records and personal accounts) and observational methods (typically in laboratories) that are also used to similarly document and analyse the allegedly asocial and ahistorical ‘reality’ of relational behaviour. This fundamental belief of psychological ‘science’, that observing and measuring predominant patterns of human behaviour provides access to ‘objective’ truth and causation, is also clearly evident in the psychiatric and evolutionary claims made in relation to child-adult attachment as the psychosocial template for adult ‘bonds’ of romantic love.

2.3 Safe havens and bonds of love

The concept and practice of an inter-subjective, emotionally saturated and altruistic union/bond established in Europe by the end of the eighteenth century (De Rougemont, 2003) came to be scientifically ‘explained’ and further refined as the zeitgeist of positivism moved to the fore of academic thought. With Bowlby’s research into mother-child attachment in Britain during the 1930s, our emotional lives and our perceptions of them came to be theorised as emerging from, and as being largely determined by, the interactions we have as children with an adult caregiver. Bowlby’s psychologisation of ‘affectional bonds’ and ‘healthy attachment’ (Bowlby, 1969, 1973, 1979) served a similar purpose to the church’s solicitation of ‘romantic union’, as discussed in chapter one, in his enforcement of a traditional morality concerned with the safety and ‘well-being’ of people in the institutions of the family and marriage and the inter-personal obligations, predictabilities and stabilities required to sustain them. At the time of Bowlby, threat to moral reason came from Freudian radicalism and the rising tide of social unrest in the lead up to, and during, World War Two (Rose, 1989). Against, for example, the problems of under-population, the increase in child ‘delinquency’, the overcrowding of child-care homes and the changing nature of women’s roles, under the auspices of the World Health Organisation the ‘union’ to be targeted by Bowlby, at least initially, was that between mother and child.

As outlined below, the resultant theory of ‘attachment’ and ‘bonds of love’ was to have significant implications for the psychology of adult romantic attachment as well as shape the field of couple therapy and its prescriptions for emotional closeness (see Johnson and Lebow,
As such, the assumptions and truth claims of attachment and emotional bondedness require due critical attention as indeed they already have in feminist critiques of mother-child attachment where the ‘naturalness’ of the maternal bond is re-interpreted as culturally constructed and as serving a patriarchal gender politics insofar as it pertains to the regulation of women in particular socio-historic ways (see Phoenix and Woollett, 1991; Richardson, 1993; Gabb, 2001).

Bowlby began observing the effects of separation from the mother on infants and young children in the UK from the mid 1930s, asserting a link between such separation, juvenile crime, and the young criminal offender (see Bowlby, 1969, 1978). Indeed psychological conceptions of ‘normal’ and ‘abnormal’ interpersonal relations in every corner of social life had their “roots in the interplay between the desires of the parents and the desires of their children” (Rose, 1999: 159). From observing what he interpreted as the ‘distress’ come ‘maladjustment’ in young children who were separated for a time from a primary caregiver, Bowlby theorised that attachment behaviour in children, observed as ‘proximity seeking’, was evidence of an evolutionary and innate mechanism that essentially afforded the child safety, security and a well adjusted emotional life if, and only if, the mother was continually present and suitably responsive. His advice concerning the ‘disrupted’ mental health of the isolated and ‘deprived’ child – later generalised to children of working mothers (Rose, 1989; Phoenix and Woollett, 1991) – centred on the idea of a “warm, intimate and continuous relationship with his [sic] mother (or permanent mother substitute)” (Bowlby, 1978: 12). For Bowlby, ‘healthy’ mother-child attachments ensured the ‘well-being’ and ‘adjustment’ of both parent and child in a ‘suitably’ affectionate, responsive, permanent, and exclusive dyadic relationship – hence its politics and regulative strategising.

From his theorisations of child delinquency, the destructiveness of separation, and ideations about the inherent properties of ‘healthy’ mother-child attachment, Bowlby went on to comment on what he termed affectional bonds as the satisfying basis of all relationships (see Bowlby, 1973, 1979). For him these bonds of affection involve intense emotions, are strong and persistent and are the biological rule of relationships. Two defining features of the

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3 For detailed discussion of the socio-political conditions in Britain and America during and after WWII as the context and motive for ‘Bowlbyism’ and psychological research concerned with the idea of ‘healthy citizenship’ in relation to the family and emotional lives, see Rose (1989).
affectional bond Bowlby identified as ‘safe haven’ and ‘secure base’. Secure base refers to the utilisation of an attachment figure as a base from which to explore one’s environment, and safe haven is seen as the reliance on this same figure for comfort against threat and danger. These, however, can be regarded as more the consequences of already culturally installed constructions of love, childhood and (‘good’) parenting rather than as ‘natural’ components of the biological mechanism of ‘bondedness’ whether between the mother and child or couples. Perhaps, like romantic love, the affectional bond is best explained as an effective strategy in the governance of ourselves - primarily the governance of mothers and then in the extension of the theory to other relationships, the governance of everyone. It is a form of governance that registers and regulates our movements, emotions, securities and our habitats; a strategy that would have us strive for the havens of ‘security and safety’ while requiring very clear obligations in terms of mutual responsiveness and the self-enactments of ‘attachment’. Thus in its biological reification and moral systemisation of the affectional bond, and in its construction of metaphoric ‘havens’, attachment theory can be seen as not having ‘discovered’ an instinct to do with inherent needs so much as participating in the carving out and coding of a specific set of emotions to do with how ‘mature and loving’ relationships should be desired, experienced, felt and preserved.  

While ‘Bowlbyism’ (Rose’s term, 1989) was the empirical confirmation of what Freud had previously suggested – that adult pathology has its origins in childhood disturbances of emotional conduct - what Bowlby had effectively counteracted was the Freudian perspective that attachment behaviour in children was to do with satisfying a nourishment and sexual drive, and in adults was about satisfying a sexual drive (Freud, 1905). But food and sex as the motivations for loving attachments were not viewed by Bowlby as an adequate basis for interpersonal relationships that needed to be ‘fixed’ via other psychotherapeutic projects and technologies as more of a guarantee for the permanence, predictability and stability of wartime familial and marital relations (Donzelot, 1979; Rose, 1989). Thus the significance of Bowlby’s attachment theory was that it essentially replaced erotic desires with a rather more

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4 Feminist and critical work has similarly challenged the totalising, evolutionary based psychological model of child and human development as framed, for example, by Freud, Piaget, Kohlberg and Bowlby and their essentialising assumptions of what constitutes the ‘developed’, ‘mature’ and ‘well-functioning’ child/adult (e.g. Walkerdine, 1984, 1993; Burman, 1994; Stainton Rogers and Stainton Rogers, 1992). In short, the critical emphasis of this body of work is that ‘normative’ psychological development has been fictioned as biologically based, sequential and gendered and that its imposition on society and people has acute moral and political effect in prescribing (masculinised and European) standards of ‘growth’, conduct and acceptability – standards which can, and have, justified the eugenics movement for instance.
domesticated and domesticating desire for *security*, comfort, a sense of *home*, and a basic need for *love* that was to be satisfied by ‘healthy’ individuals in ‘healthy’ dyadic attachments. The subjects of attachment theory were no longer the “amoral seeker[s] of instinctual gratification” (Richards, 1996: 137), but clearly moralised and domesticated in *bonded* relationships wherein self-assessing individuals gauged their own development, worth and contentment according to the ‘correct’ organisation of affections and emotional welfare.

Bowlby privileged the mother-child *dyad* as the enabling relationship for a well adjusted life over the “mommy-daddy-me” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1977: 106) *triad* of Freud’s Oedipal relationship and the dyad was (re)enforced as the proper context for relations of love. Bowlby also rejected Freudian notions of fluidity in regards to relationships of love in favour of the regularity, closure, self-control and morality assumed by affectional bonds (see Bowlby 1973). Not opposed to non-monogamy, Freud had stipulated two *currents* of libido he considered necessary for a normal attitude to love: the ‘affectionate’ and the ‘sensual’ currents (1912; cited in Gay, 1995: 394-400). His somewhat chaotic ‘currents’ of passion and affection carry connotations of partiality, flow and flux; implying a non-exclusivity and non-permanence that Bowlby was to recode as no less than life threatening and pathological. Indeed, for him an “emphasis on mobility and its contempt for the stay-at-home, is no friend of mental health” (Bowlby, 1973: 52).

Thus the competing interest of Bowlbyism was to reinstate, adjust and develop already in place cultural and moral mores and in so doing moved to the fore of social, political and academic acceptance. He had instigated a (re)configuration of circuits of governance, relations of power, and normalising discursive practices which, in being developed by a soon to emerge ‘new science of relationships’ (Kelley *et al*., 1983) that continued with a concern for ‘stable’ emotional relationships, ‘normal’ development and effective intervention, moulded particular ways of conceptualising the couple. The application of attachment theory to the couple relationship was consolidated with the publication of Hazan and Shaver’s paper *Romantic Love Conceptualised as an Attachment Process* (1987). But this was not before the ideas of ‘safe havens’ and ‘secure’ bonds of love had been further psychologised, defined and warranted.
Under the Bowlby banner, Ainsworth et al (1978) published their highly influential work on patterns of attachment, delineating and categorising ‘secure and insecure’ attachment styles according to emotional value and quality. Interested in demonstrations of ‘secure’ attachment between mother/parent and child, Ainsworth and her colleagues observed attachment behaviours in the home and the laboratory. From what was inferred by observation, three styles of attachment were identified and systematised as secure, avoidant, and ambivalent, with the avoidant and ambivalent groups being categorised as ‘insecure’ and ‘anxious’. Briefly summarised, secure attachment (60% of infants) was said to involve comfort with having a parent close by and anxiety in being separated. Insecure attachments (40% of infants) involved either avoidance of closeness and lack of distress at separation, or ambivalent reaction to closeness and separation. In other words, dependent behaviour was attributed to ‘secure’ attachment.

Synopsis of these categorical descriptions is included here in order to highlight the subjective interpretations and dubious value judgements made concerning what constitutes ‘secure’ and ‘healthy’ attachment. Clearly a range of interpretations could apply to the behaviours observed. For example, could not ‘secure’ behaviour be reinterpreted as spoilt and overly dependent and the ‘avoidant’ style of attachment as secure in its independence? The unproblematised transposition of these codes, their presumptions and valuations, to the ‘secure and healthy’ couple is equally perplexing and menacing, yet it was to be just as influential. With the application of attachment theory to adult love relationships, at last psychology was able to offer a parsimonious account of love and bondedness – the lack of which had been troubling the discipline (but not the psychoanalysis it excluded) since Harlow (1958) made it clear that it knew no more of love than poets and novelists. Following the advent of attachment theory and its influential claims, nagging questions to do with why some couple relationships are maintained and others not, and what the patterns of stability are, could now be empirically addressed.

Despite some later controversy over the stability of the ‘attachment system’ in adults (Feeney, 1999), armed with the typology of Ainsworth et al (1978) Hazan and Shaver now had the means of conceptualising the “entire range of romantic love experiences” (Hazan and Shaver, 1987: 512) and for detecting continuities and predictabilities inherent in the “laws of relationship structure and process” (Hazan and Shaver, 1994: 2). They argued that
the processes of child attachment could be hypothesised as being the same in adult attachment behaviour given an invariant neural foundation, the exclusivity of the bond, adult reactions to separation, and the supposed physical and psychological health effects of these in adults. Their research was driven by the *a priori* assumption that we ‘naturally’ want to have and maintain, and not reject or avoid, the typical experience of ‘romantic’ and ‘bonded’ coupledom. To not be ‘properly bonded’ continues to be theorised as an unhappy state that is the fault of the individual (and her/his mother) who is, as cause and consequence, likely to be unfulfilled and lacking in self-esteem. As such, theorisations of adult romantic attachment are clearly predicated on, while they also perpetuate, the culturally installed dichotomisation of separation-attachment (the ‘lonely’ and the ‘paired’, as discussed in chapter one) as an *a priori* condition for what being ‘coupled’ means (see also Cassidy and Shaver, 1999; and Mikulincer *et al*, 2002).

Paraphrasing Hazan and Shaver (1987), *secure* lovers are those who believe in an enduring ‘romantic love’ (their term), while *avoidant* lovers tend to dismiss ‘true love’ as rare or mythical. The *ambivalent* lover sits on the fence and so is also less inclined to know ‘true love’. These researchers make it clear that they do not see romantic love as a “socio-historical invention” but as a “biological process designed by evolution to facilitate attachment between adult sexual partners” (Hazan and Shaver, 1987: 523). Such a position, however, was at the time (and has since been) thoroughly critiqued by feminist and critical theorists who emphasise the social construction of love and emotion (e.g. Radway, 1984; Averill, 1985; Harré, 1986; Stearns and Stearns, 1988; Wetherell, 1995; Stenner and Watts, 1998). Indeed, the value laden presumptions and inferences about what constitutes acceptable adult attachment are to be approached as derisory and highly questionable. For one thing, the ‘avoidant’s’ non-endorsement of ‘true romantic love’ can alternatively represent a ‘security’ not so dependent on taking up residence in the ‘safe haven’ of post thirteenth-century romantic tradition and can suggest a ‘healthy’ scepticism. And the classifications become even less straightforward for some attachment theorists. For example, Brennan *et al* (1998) later reported half of their participants as being classifiable as ‘secure’ on one measure but as
‘insecure’ on another, and ‘insecure’ groups have been characterised as reporting comparable degrees of ‘stability’ overall (Kirkpatrick and Hazan, 1994).

Brennan et al’s (1998) split and inconsistent self-classifying subject capable of being spread across the indices of both ‘secure’ and ‘insecure’ can be seen as reflecting a more fundamental cultural division between the private and public subjectivities of modernity that is believed to require a balance of both autonomy and dependence (e.g. Cancian, 1987; Giddens, 1992). While initially in attachment theory it was as if the ‘safe haven’ and the security of dependence acted as a secure refuge for the self against those other subjectifying rationalities of autonomy and self-reliance, the developing and fluctuating characterisation of ‘secure’ adult attachments later came to emphasise a “balance of closeness and autonomy in relationships” (Feeney, 1999: 364, emphasis added). The point here is that in relation to these dichotomised fields of private/public, secure/insecure, and autonomous/connected selfhoods and relationships, discursive and ethical tensions exist that involve very different standards of, and competing processes for, the feelings and attainments of personal security and relational stability. Hence the emergent constructs of relational and personal stability/security and their opposites, all inextricably linked to liberalist versions of isolation, autonomy, freedom, rights and duty are to be problematised as culturally and historically specific. Their meanings emerge within a post World War Two political rationality that defines and uses these ‘qualities’ as a means of governing through self-regulation as we are encouraged to attain freedom in stable and secure relationships and identities and within which we are made docile, rendered governable, and kept productive (Deleuze and Guattari, 1977; Rose, 1989).

The very notions of ‘security’ and ‘stability’ are inter-related political constructs that are not only fashioned against the manufacture of threat and danger but also sustain politico-economic determinations of language, labour, culture, custom and identity (Buzan, 1991; Buzan et al, 1998; see chapter six). These are qualities that are injected into various issues of political concern (economic, societal, relational and environmental) for political benefit and so are constituted in a specific political arena in particular ways. They are tied to the problem of governing at a distance such that the subject, emotions and private lives are securitised and stabilised; that is, normalised in the name of a freedom largely represented by notions of what it is to be safe, secure, and certain (and not). Thus that which is qualified and valued as
representing ‘security’ and ‘stability’ in selves and couple relationships (and elsewhere) is saturated with power and functions as support for a complex political apparatus. The very tenets of Bowlbyism and the subsequent psychologisation of ‘bonds of love’ are not without political and disciplinary effect when it is asserted that:

“[The] basic disposition of animal and human behaviour – to feel secure with the familiar and to be wary of the strange – are in the main good guides. For whatever is familiar is likely to be safe, whilst whatever is strange may perhaps be dangerous.”

(Bowlby, 1978: 49)

As the means by which familiarity is embraced and the strange avoided, the qualities of security and stability used to evaluate, discipline and normalise couple relationships/identities demand critical attention. We should be cautious of a psychology that draws up and valorises these qualities as it examines, measures and seeks to predict ‘stable’ partnerships that are assumed to be healthy, happy and successful in their stability but which are moreover regulated in and by these qualities and evaluations. And we should question the theoretical and everyday deployment of self-relational technologies that move us towards a familiarity that is ‘good’ or ‘secure’ because it bears a relation to the instincts of humanity or to natural behaviour and desire when the ‘familiar’, ‘strange’ and ‘naturalness’ of humanity can be seen as being no more than politically ordered fictions that have come to ‘function as truth’ (Foucault, 1977e).

2.4 The stabilisations of commitment and trust

While Bowlby was concerned with the production of happy, healthy mother-child relationships, in a post-war America Terman et al (1938) produced the first psychological study into marriage stability. Its particular interest lay in what was different about ‘happy’ and ‘unhappy’ marriages and was to inspire social research that attempted to predict marital/couple stability well into the twentieth century (Gottman and Notaritrous, 2002). Following the traditions of personality theory and with a strong research background in the measurement of intelligence, Terman and colleagues asked whether some personality traits were more suited to marriage than others. Using self-report data, however, no optimal personality profile was found. Nevertheless, many others were quick to compile them,
highlighting gender stereotypes in the process. For example, in *Building a Successful Marriage*, Landis and Landis (1948, and still in circulation) – rather like the more recent ‘Venus and Mars’ code for improving marriages (Gray, 1992) - depicted the happily married woman as kind, cooperative, accepting of a subordinate role and being advised by a husband, and as harbouring missionary and ministerial attitudes. The happily married man was endowed with even emotions, benevolence, superior initiative, a responsible attitude and an eye for detail. And not surprisingly in the midst of Bowlbyism, Landis and Landis advised readers to consider the strength of a partner’s attachment to their parents as a guide for choosing a mate.

The late 1950s saw a break with the personality paradigm and an *interactional* perspective was adopted by social psychology as a way of predicting marital stability. A new paradigm of interpersonal *exchange* and *interdependence* represented a move from the personalities of Terman’s research to the internal dynamics, systematic ‘laws’, and normative controls of dyadic interaction that, unlike Bowlby’s biological attachment, is retold as a matter of rationalist economics and equitable balance. As such, with social psychology’s involvement in the field of romantic relationships and its (re)emphasis on economic models for theorising the couple experience, there can be discerned a move away from a concern for the emotional security of ‘safe havens’ (as Bowlby had theorised them) to one centred on the ‘stability’ of economic rationality and balance. And this paradigm shift does not occur in isolation from a post war neo-liberal emphasis on an economic freedom that is to be practised in the form of individual autonomy, enterprise and choice (Barry *et al*, 1996; Rose, 1999).

Beginning with the work of Thibaut and Kelley (1959) and the idea that the exchange of social and material resources is a central aspect of human interaction, the cognitive *social exchange* perspective was to develop as a theory of economic behaviour that could explain relationship ‘stability’ in terms of how people arrive at their decisions to maintain a relationship or not. Thibaut and Kelley’s premise was that “relationships grow, develop, deteriorate, and dissolve as a consequence of an unfolding social-exchange process, which may be conceived as a bartering of rewards and costs between the partners” (Karney and Bradbury, 1995: 4). Involving the four fundamental constructs of rewards, costs, outcomes and comparison levels (comparing a current relationship with alternatives), the model of social exchange – later specified by Kelley and Thibaut (1978) as ‘interdependence theory’
(see also the equity theory of Walster et al., 1973) predicts that relationships will last as long as the benefits outweigh the costs. Social exchange theory was to subsequently become “the most cited theoretical perspective in research on marriage and close relationships” (Karney and Bradbury, 1995: 4), and along with attachment theory was to function as another cornerstone of couple therapy (Johnson and Lebow, 2000).

One of the first applications of social exchange theory to marriage came with Levinger’s (1965, 1976) construction of the cognitive components of couple commitment. The early focus on relational commitment was significant in that it “provided a useful solution to the problem of unhappy stable relationships” (Adam and Jones, 1999: 7). What had in fact occurred since Terman et al. (1938) was a perplexing recognition in the early 1960s that ‘stable’ (or enduring) marriages are not necessarily ‘happy’ ones (see Gottman and Notarius, 2002). It seemed that emotional quality did not necessarily equate with stability, as previously assumed by Bowlby in particular. Measuring marital satisfaction according to levels of happiness was, therefore, not enough to account for stability, and in the contexts of ‘free love’, ‘open marriage’ and the increasing divorce rates of the 1960s, marital ‘stability’ was certainly of paramount socio-economic and political importance. A clearer account of why and how marriages succeed and fail outside of the terms of happiness and longevity was necessary (Karney and Bradbury, 1995) and so an exploration of the cognitive dynamics of commitment was begun that identified ‘stable’ relationships (dyadic, exclusive and permanent) as a function of individual attitude and rationalist economics. The point, it seems, was to find out what made marriages last rather than the problem being a concern with the unhappiness in (some) long-lasting marriages. In this search for other variables as predictors of marital/couple success and failure, behavioural theorists were similarly concerning themselves with the exchange and perception of positive and negative behaviours (e.g. Stuart, 1969).

“By focusing on commitment”, suggest Adams and Jones (1999: 9), “it became possible for researchers to isolate a construct that could hold marriages together and that was under the direct control of the married partners.” Couples no longer had to worry about simply being ‘happy’, (un)lucky in love, having a healthy attachment to parents, or having the ‘right’ personality. Working at their levels of commitment and making economic assessments of it could, it seemed, help to ensure marital stability which continued to be posited as the
penultimate goal of partnership. In a neo-liberal era of the entrepreneurial, self-fashioning subject (as discussed in chapter six), couples themselves could now actively manage the maintenance of their own partnerships by maximising benefits, minimising costs, protecting investments, and by avoiding attractive alternatives to current relationships; that is, if they took responsibility for the success of their own relationships beyond simply being happy in them or biologically well attuned to the natural force of attachment. By recommending and regulating how such responsibility is best enacted, in prescribing what it means to be ‘committed’ (see Adams and Jones, 1999) and in identifying effective ‘maintenance behaviours’ (see Harvey and Wenzel, 2001), psychological expertise and intervention were, and are, ready at hand to assist with why and how couples can remain committed to a married or married-like relationship.

In the various models of couple commitment that have been advanced primarily from an interdependence perspective involving social exchange and equity theories, there is much thematic overlap (e.g. Levinger 1965, 1976; Walster et al, 1978; Rosenblatt, 1977; Rusbult, 1983; Cate et al, 1982; Sprecher, 1988; Johnson and Rusbult, 1989; Rusbult et al, 2001; Frank and Brandstätter, 2002). Although there is no consensus in psychology about what ‘commitment’ is (Sabatelli, 1999; Hendrick, 2004), it is generally understood as a person’s intention to stay in a relationship (Rosenblatt, 1977) or as a “sense of allegiance” to a partner (Rusbult et al, 2001: 95). Despite its abstractness, commitment is theorised as a single construct with three clear dimensions or global aspects (Adams and Jones, 1999). These can be summarised as (a) the intention to continue the relationship based on desire and perception of rewards such as emotional security, sexual fulfilment, social status; (b) the observance of obligations such as moral, religious and social mores; and (c) the constraint of external factors such as family pressure, fear of negative consequences or the costs of break-up, or the absence of attractive alternatives. Johnson (1991; cf. Frank and Brandstätter, 2002) summarises these dimensions as: wanting to be (personal commitment); oughting to be (moral commitment); and as having to be committed (structural commitment), respectively.

Perlman (2001) summarises social psychology’s prescriptions of ‘maintenance behaviours’ as including the strategies of sharing tasks and fostering social networks, disclosure, closely attending to partners, the accommodations of self-sacrifice and positive illusions, and equality.
The alluded to ‘sense of allegiance’, then, includes fidelity, devotion and homage to a range of established cultural and moral pressures that remain unchallenged in the theorisations of a commitment that is assumed to simply reflect what people decide and think in the processes of maintaining relationships. In this the idea of pursuing and being committed can be seen as the consistent and enthusiastic pursuit of a culturally solicited line of action (Surra et al., 1999) wherein the subject is bound by culturally installed duties and moral obligations and is thus not ‘free’ to negotiate and manage simple cognitive equations of costs, rewards and outcomes on their own behalf. There is, then, a tension in the social exchange notion of the committed subject who is assumed to be free to assess and decide but who can simultaneously lack a freedom. Furthermore, the construct of commitment assumes a universal preference for exclusive, one-to-one, serialised relationships and sets up an either-or problematic (that is, one relationship or another) in the juxtaposition of ‘committed’ relationships with ‘alternatives’ that cannot be had concurrently and which must be downplayed in the upkeep of what one already has and the certainty of that. So while theorisations of couple commitment can be seen as being tied to political constructions of the entrepreneurial subject who is free to choose and maximise their own security, such a freedom and security are knowable in specific ways and work to diminish ‘choice’ as attractive alternatives are not only talked about as being ‘alternative’ but also as ideally avoided.

By including moral and structural constraints, or entrapments, under the rubric of ‘commitment’ that continues to be viewed as a worthy line of human pursuit and a positive feature of coupledom, the power effects of this construction of commitment are seriously sidestepped. Beyond a singular focus on how people cognitively maintain their dyadic ‘allegiances’ and ‘dependencies’ for the good of a long-term relationship (see Harvey and Wenzel, 2001), mainstream psychology is yet to consider the power effects inherent in why allegiances of the kind prescribed are to be sought and in how they are to be maintained. In treating commitment as a natural human desire and moral disposition, empiricist psychological theory does not account for the subjectivity of the neo/liberal individual who is first endowed with a ‘right’ and ‘capacity’ to promise and vouch for futures as personal freedoms and securities are sought (see chapter six). Ways in which ‘costs’, ‘outcomes’ and ‘investments’ are framed and justified against ideologies of autonomy and personal freedom, for example, have not featured as a research concern, nor how ‘rewards’ are variously
constructed and deployed in the service of the ‘permanent and exclusive’ imperative that the traditional model of coupledom presumes and against which liberal theories of commitment gain their currency (see the critiques of Hollway, 1989; Lawes, 1999).

Paraphrasing Rusbult et al (2001), as people of both genders become increasingly dependent on a partner – that is, are willing to invest in a relationship, work at it, succumb to cultural/moral norms, and resist alternatives – a commitment is strengthened which in turn increases a willingness to compromise and sacrifice. In this light, the self-interested, autonomous, economically oriented individual of social exchange and equity theory is further positioned in psychological constructions of commitment as morally astute, positively dependent, compliant, accommodating, and forgiving. Contradictorily positioned in various ways within the interplay of Christian-romantic altruism, symbiotic union, the dependencies and securities of attachment theory, the self-interest of exchange, and, from the 1950s, the humanist notion of ‘unconditional’ care – all of which have impacted on what it is to be ‘committed’ - the committed subject has come to be constituted by a number of often conflicting motivations, concerns and obligations that renders the simplistic ideas of personal decision or an individually controlled and cognitively enacted ‘balance of exchange’ a highly contentious one.

Closely associated with psychological theories of ‘committed’ relationships is the power-infused concept of trust (e.g. Rotter, 1980; Larzelere and Huston, 1980; Rempel et al, 1985; Holmes and Rempel, 1989; Boon, 1994). Like commitment, the psychology of dyadic trust (Larzelere and Huston, 1980) has its origins in theories of exchange and so is similarly understood as a “generally desirable, static, measurable attitude held by the individual” (Willig, 1997: 211, see also Stephenson et al, 2000; Rusbult et al, 2001). For example, Rotter (1967, 1980) has conceptualised and measured trust as an enduring personality trait that is shaped (not surprisingly) by childhood attachments. Like the three dimensions of commitment, trust is said to involve three components that drive a relationship forward (Holmes and Rempel, 1989). These are (a) the predictability of a partner, (b) the dependability of a partner, and (c) one’s faith or belief in a partner to fulfil the commitment or promise made. For Holmes and Rempel (1989), for whom trust is “a process of uncertainty reduction” (ibid.: 190), a developing sense of trust is likely to increase mutual dependency, to stimulate investment in a relationship, reduce the attractiveness of
alternatives and thus enhance an order of certainly and regularity. Like commitment, trust is investigated in dyadic terms and assumes a pervasive desire for monogamous, exclusive and permanent partnerships. Thus the ‘goodness’ of trust(worthiness), more than simply reflecting a desirable attitude and behaviour, can be critically viewed as serving to police cultural prohibitions, normative standards and expectations.

In ‘trusting’ relationships, what it is to be ‘predictable’, ‘dependable’ and ‘deserving’ of someone’s faith can be seen as requiring the consistent enactment of regulatory obligations and performances in order to be deemed trustworthy and trusted. The construct of couple-trust assumes coherent, transparent subjectivities and consistent, disclosed behaviours. That is to say, the deployment of a couple-trust construed as a marker of dependability and predictability requires the individual to not merely manifest an appropriate ‘disposition’ but to be consistent in thought, predictable in movement and regular in conduct else a moral judgement is made of them. Thus the virtuous quality of trust disciplines subjects according to a required certainty and visibility as much as it aims to guarantee the fulfilment of promises. And in being so disciplined, in adhering to culturally and morally solicited lines of action that have broader socio-economic and political pretexts, one is determined as ‘trustworthy’ and made grateful that one’s moral/ethical authenticity is confirmed by another who bestows the trust. As discussed in chapter six, the operation of trust in couple relationships - one’s right to expect it and another’s duty to perform it – establishes power relations as it functions to monitor and regulate every detail of thought, conduct and conscience.

So far I have outlined the psychologised processes of emotional attachment, commitment and trust – relational qualities that social psychology sets up as guiding us into secure, fulfilling, and healthy partnerships and which prescribe ways to conduct ourselves with a partner. Re-conceptualising these valued qualities as discursive practices and strategic forms of power we can begin to challenge some of the normalising and disciplinary components of coupledom that we use to make ourselves and our partnerships intelligible and which we deploy in the name of personal ‘freedom’. The power of these normative standards and regulatory components can be seen as functioning in how we are ‘satisfied’ in ‘successful’ relationships and in how we psychologically tune ourselves in line with them. It is in the psychological construction of such ‘qualities’ for which the subject takes responsibility that
the self-mutual governance of conduct is initiated, that knowledges are produced and others averted, that certain technologies are enabled and power is generated. Attachment, commitment and trust are three such power-knowledges, intimacy is another.

2.5 Profiling couple intimacy

In the psychological literature of the couple it is the broadly conceived concept of intimacy that has received the most attention, particularly from the 1970s (e.g. Jourard, 1964, 1971; Oden, 1974; Hinde, 1978; Eshleman and Clarke, 1978) when it seemed to be operationalised as a vague cover term for what it is to be dyadically bonded or connected in both emotional and/or sexual terms. Psychology typically refers to the experience and enactment of intimacy as that which we all naturally desire, need and search for (e.g. Rogers, 1973; Branden, 1981), with our ability to obtain and express it said to be prefigured in early childhood (e.g. Erickson, 1963). From this perspective, as we capably express ‘true’ intimacy and unreservedly receive it back from significant others, we are thought to be psychologically healthy, emotionally mature, and well equipped for true love (e.g. Freud, 1905; Erickson, 1963; Branden, 1981; Pittman, 1989). In demarcating intimacy as “the distinguishing mark of a person’s most important and valued relationships” (Prager, 2000: 229) and as that which contributes most to relationship satisfaction (Hassebrauck and Fehr, 2002), psychology is particularly concerned with locating, revealing, and measuring an assumed distinct ‘nature’ of intimacy so that it can advise on how to best achieve and sustain it.

Intimacy has been largely theorised as an aspect of interpersonal exchange whether cognitive, affective and/or physical (e.g. Argyle and Dean, 1965; Hatfield et al, 1985; Hatfield and Rapson, 1994). According to Berscheid and Reis (1988), intimacy has been used to refer to feelings of affectionate closeness, to a state wherein one’s thoughts and feelings are revealed to another, to forms of non-verbal interaction such as touch and close physical proximity, and to sexual activity, amongst other things. Again, definitions of intimacy - regarded as knowable in itself (Prager, 1995, 2000) or as an aspect of love (Sternberg, 1986) – are highly contested and abstract (Archer, 2000; Mackey et al, 2000). They appear to be often based on the theorist’s personal perception of ‘closeness’ and can lack empirical validity (Moss and Schwebel, 1993). Indeed, what is meant by intimacy in terms of what it involves and how it’s experienced is far from agreed on, stable or consistent. As Moss and
Schwebel (1993:32) have suggested, this leaves analysis of the concept open to “a large array of interpretive and operational possibilities”, which indeed is apparent in the literature. Abstract though it may be, the ‘proper’ exchange of intimacy and one’s cognitive perception of it in both ‘close’ and ‘romantic’ relationships has been accredited with a range of benefits ranging from marital happiness, resilience to disease and good mental health, to reducing the likelihood of having car accidents (see Prager, 1995).

The ‘intimacy’ said to be involved in marriages and romantic relationships has been given special significance through being delineated from other non-romantic forms (see Davis, 1973, as an early example). In intimacy research the romantic dyad is strongly prioritised as the context for a full expression of intimate closeness and the construct is accredited as yet another measure by which the quality and satisfaction of these relationships are reflected and evaluated (Prager, 1995, 2000). It was from the early 1980s that psychology began to measure partner perceptions of intimacy (e.g. Schaefer and Olson, 1981) and devise therapeutic programmes to help couples in the exchange of ‘genuine’ intimacy and emotional closeness (e.g. Frankel, 1982; Masters et al, 1982; Greenberg and Johnson, 1986). The timing of this theoretical concern for the quality of intimacy is significant in that it ties in with a cultural shift from the morality of sexual monogamy to the ethics of emotion and the changing forces of regulation conjured in this (see chapter seven).

In his well-known Games People Play as a guide to better relationships, Berne offered one of the first definitions of couple intimacy as “the spontaneous game-free candidness of an aware person” (Berne, 1964: 180; italics added). Jourard (1964, 1971) was to similarly give particular emphasis to an ‘intimacy’ that was apparently best achieved and demonstrated by a technology he specified as self-disclosure. Following Jourard, most of the definitions and conceptions of intimacy, whether in close relationships or romantic ones, “center on self-disclosure as a necessary, often sufficient, requirement for intimacy” (Parks and Floyd, 1996: 88). Thus the ‘self-disclosure’ imperative came to be developed as a primary aspect of the multidimensional definitions of intimacy. Hinde (1978: 378), for example, defined intimacy as “the number of different facets of the personality which are revealed to the partner and to what depth.” What it means to be ‘self-aware’ and to ‘self-disclose’ as indicators of ‘genuine’ intimacy clearly assumes notions of a coherent and relatively static ‘self’ whose innermost depths, secrets and truths can be unproblematically revealed and objectively known. That is,
theorisations of self-disclosing intimacy assume a ‘reality’ and ‘genuine authenticity’ to the fiction of the self-knowing subject (see Foucault, 1978a; Henriques et al, 1984; Shotter and Gergen, 1989 for critiques of the self-knowing individual). On the Enlightenment model of the self-contained individual (Sampson, 1977, 1989) who harbours an interiority that is to be accessed, spoken, and made entirely known to both oneself and a partner, the profile of the confessing, visible, and emotionalised ‘intimate’ subject was to be compiled together with accompanying behavioural prescriptions for the full expression of this subjectivity (see Foucault, 1978a, and chapters four and seven).

The profile of the mature intimate subject includes characteristics such as positive affect, emotional warmth, empathy, accountability, physical expressiveness, and shared commitment (see Moss and Schwebel, 1993; Prager, 1995, 2000). Some theorists (e.g. Fromm, 1957; Oden, 1974; Branden, 1981) add the experience of symbiotic ‘transcendence’ (or ‘oneness’) as a further but seemingly contradictory characteristic of intimate subjectivity given that intimacy is usually theorised as “the prime site for the development of our self-contained individuality” (Stainton Rogers et al, 1995: 92). So the psychology of couple intimacy not only rests on the notion of a self-knowing individual already shown to be fictional but also involves paradox and tension in that the point to intimacy seems to be to retain and elevate the ‘self’ while simultaneously giving it up in the romantic ideal of intersubjective ‘oneness’ (Luhmann, 1986). Indeed, much debate continues around this tension between the relational value of intimacy and the individualistic value of autonomy. The issue for psychology is whether the warrant for individualisation conflicts with or promotes relational intimacy (Prager, 1995). For some theorists these two values are in conflict (e.g. Luhmann, 1986), while for others intimate relationships are seen to enhance individualism (e.g. Aron et al, 1992). Generally, intimacy theorists have settled on the opinion that both values are necessary and compatible (e.g. Masters et al, 1982; Prager, 1995) while the basis of such compatibility is not so clear. From a more critical perspective, others have understood the tension as being discursively produced and so have moved the focus from argument about the ‘natural’ functioning of relationships to consideration of how the inevitable cultural/discursive tension is variously managed by people in relationship dialogue (e.g. Baxter and Montgomery, 1996; Baxter and Erbert, 1999).
In search of a global model of romantic intimacy and the workings of the “intimate relationship mind” (Fletcher, 2002: 3), social psychology again tends to exclusively focus on committed couples in dyadic, monogamous, heterosexual relationships. Like the sample pool used in the construction of other relationship components, intimacy research makes its claims largely from data procured from white, middle-class, North American college students for whom, it has been suggested, high levels of emotional closeness is the preferred cultural trend (Johnson and Lebow, 2000). Using data procured from the statements and normative practices of this cohort, the universal image and function of ‘intimacy’ has been scientifically ‘revealed’ and recommended. The themes of dependability, reliability, consistency and mutual accountability that run through psychological conceptions of relational stability, security, commitment and trust are further refined and confirmed in empiricist accounts of couple intimacy. The power effects of intimacy similarly pertain to what is required of the ‘inner most self’ in terms of its formation, quality, and willing exposure. With the relational and self-technology of intimacy, not only what one does but who and what one is becomes integral to ideations of the ‘successful’ couple.

2.6 Love and sex

In psychological accounts of what constitutes the satisfactions of successful couples, the qualities of love and sex are measured alongside of, or as, commitment, intimacy and trust (Fletcher et al, 2000). Love (as either passionate or companionate) is routinely reported as the basis for choosing a mate, marrying and staying together (Burgess and Wallin, 1953; Ashford, 1987; Buss et al, 1990) and monogamy is laid as the foundation for satisfying couple sex (Eysenck and Wakefield, 1981; Blumstein and Schwartz, 1983, Greeley, 1991). Sexual satisfaction in married heterosexual couples is measured by a number of various items ranging from frequency of orgasm for both wives and husbands, duration of intercourse, and a low desire for sexual intercourse with someone else (see Cramer, 1998; Hendrick, 2004). And reported gender and sexuality differences are abundant. In her recent review of psychological research Hendrick (2004) highlights alleged (evolutionary based) gender differentiation as pertaining to the tendency in women to “pair sex with emotional involvement and relational commitment” (ibid.: 98) and that men are more likely to “agree with an attitude of sexual permissiveness” (ibid.: 107). While claiming that it is safe to say that significant differences in ‘lovemaking frequency’ are not apparent between gay and
lesbian couples, Hendrick (2004) flags up the usual stereotype that gay male couples, more than lesbian or heterosexual couples, are more accepting of non-monogamy in that they see it as unrelated to relational satisfaction and a developed sense of commitment.

Based on the opinion of European and American participants that sex should be confined to a loving or married relationship and remain exclusive to it, psychology generally assumes the cultural association of sex and love (Cramer, 1998). On the basis of these moral preferences the presupposed, naturally occurring (and co-occurring) qualities of love and sex that demarcate them as essential components of a relationship and as indicators of ‘satisfaction’ are infused with prescriptive value judgements, meanings, and cultural story-telling.

Although the psychological literature on love had by the late 1980s come to incorporate much, often disparate variation in approach and opinion (Fehr, 1988; Marston et al., 1998), it is nevertheless possible to trace some of the clustered ‘qualities’ of love in the psychological architecture of coupledom. These are selectively and briefly discussed here.

Early theorists Hatfield and Walster (1978; also Walster and Walster, 1978) distinguished ‘passionate’ from ‘companionate’ love, defining the former as a “state of intense longing for union with another” (Hatfield and Walster, 1978: 9). In emphasising ‘union’ and ‘bondedness’, Hatfield and Walster’s sense of ‘being in love’ confirmed emotional exclusivity, controlled passion, and serial monogamy as foundational. It was a closed, committed and ideally permanent dyad that psychology was reinforcing in its constructions of the various qualities of love. In the theoretical preference for a companionate love believed to be more important than its passionate (emotional and sexual) counterpart (Walster and Walster, 1978; Berscheid and Walster, 1978; Fehr, 1988, 1993), companionate features are specified as friendship, trust, honesty and respect (Hendrick, 2004). This conceptualisation of ‘companionate love’ was to take a firm hold in psychology and by the late 1980s a whole series of duties, responsibilities, and rights can be seen to have been generalised and psychologised according to a typology of love that acted as a counter to the more spontaneous, mobile, extra-dyadic expressions of love and sex that had been pushed for and experimented with in the albeit rather limited cultural radicalism of the previous two decades (as discussed below).
From the various prototypes, taxonomies, and exemplars of ‘love’ on offer in Psychology (cognitive, behavioural and affective - see Lee, 1973, 1977; Marston et al, 1987; Sternberg, 1986), couple love has been reduced to three primary themes or aspects. From their factor analysis of Fehr’s (1988) 68 features of love, and one which closely resembles Sternberg’s (1986) triangular arrangement of love, Aron and Westbay (1996) identify the three main dimensions of love as (a) **intimacy**, involving honesty, openness, empathy, (b) **commitment**, involving devotion, protection and sacrifice, and as (c) **passion**, involving excitement and sex. (cf. Marston et al, 1998; Meeks et al, 1998). Thus it is clear that what it is to love, be intimate, sexual and committed in the realm of coupledom are all closely associated (Marston et al, 1998); all working to muster, refine and reinforce each other in the perpetuation of a singular model for couple relations. But as Solomon (1981) argues, the needs, styles and components said to make up romantic love are cultural inventions and a collective choice rather than biologically or psychologically determined. “And what we have collectively chosen”, he concludes, “because it is chosen, might always be reconsidered” (ibid.: 214).

“Romantic love is by no means ‘natural’; it is not an instinct but a very particular and peculiar attitude toward sex and pair-bonding that has been carefully cultivated by a small number of modern aristocratic and middle-class societies.”

(Solomon, 1981: 28)

In arguing for the constructed nature of love and its cultural-historical contingency, Solomon suggests that the kind of society that makes romantic love possible is one that, among other things, prioritises individuality, differentiates public from private, and places a notion of personal choice at the centre of mating and marriage. These and other socio-historic conditions as the ‘conditions of possibility’ (Foucault, 1972) for contemporary coupledom are the focus of the semantic history of chapter four.

So while psychology reports that people say they are in ‘love’ when they marry or couple-up, and that “relationships characterised by greater love are more likely to endure” (Cramer, 1998: 144), it is also recognised that the concept of love is a social construct (e.g. Averill, 1985; Harré, 1986), involves no homogenous, unitary meaning (Lee, 1977; Sternberg, 1996; Stenner and Watts, 1998), and is not the simple and transparent representation of affection, attraction, attachment, for example, but consists of multiple, often negative and contradictory functions. Indeed “there are few concepts as polysemous, contested and
elusive as ‘love’. And there are fewer still with as long and complex a history of usage.” (Kendall and Crossley, 1996: 178). Hence in interrogating the problematics of ‘love’ in relation to psychoanalysis and therapy, Kendall and Crossley (1996) do not attempt to unravel the ‘true meaning’ of love as is generally the want of psychology but are instead concerned with how love functions as a “vehicle through which norms and expectations are both generated and anchored” (ibid.: 179) and how love “serves as a support or relay for multiple strategies of intervention into human action, experience and relationships” (ibid.: 179; cf. Stenner and Watts, 1998). Such an approach is more in line with the perspective taken in this current analysis of the various, interconnected grids of intelligibility that are active in the realms of coupledom and couple-subjectivities. Closely associated with love as one such grid of intelligibility, is the power-knowledge of couple-sex.

In alignment with a pervasive cultural belief that sex is an integral aspect of partnership love, social psychologists regard sexual desire and involvement as one of the factors that differentiates romantic love from other forms (e.g. Swain, 1989; Helgeson et al, 1987). There is, however, little agreement as to the nature of the love-sex couplet in terms of which aspect is supposed to be subordinate to which, which is more satisfying, or which is the better indicator of stability (Regan, 1998; cf. de Munck, 1998). More agreed upon are the presumptions that ‘quality’ couple-sex is monogamous because such a practice is a universal ‘norm’ and facilitates bonding, and that sexual monogamy is, therefore, a strong predictor of relationship stability (Laumann et al, 1994; Cramer, 1998; Waite and Joyner, 2001; Fletcher, 2002). Hence there has been little attempt to ascertain the ‘stability’ or ‘quality’ of extra-dyadic relationships (Buunk and Dijkstra, 2000). Researchers typically assume a universal preference for monogamous practice because most Western people say they ‘believe’ in it (Cramer, 1998), because a large majority of white heterosexuals consistently disapprove of non-monogamy, because adultery is believed to stem from problems in a relationship, and because non-monogamy is allegedly characterised by poor mental health and maladjustment (see Buunk and Dijkstra, 2000).

Sociobiology, evolutionary psychology and ethology purport that our capacity for monogamous pair-bonding (and jealousy) reflects an essential human characteristic and is a means of survival as a reproductive strategy (e.g. Kenrick and Trost, 1987; Eibl-Eibesfeldt, 1989; Buss and Schmidt, 1993). Although often refuted on many grounds, not least of which
is the speculative basis for such a universalised belief (see Hafner, 1993; Fisher, 1992; Barash and Lipton, 2001), the evolutionary credo remains pervasive in mainstream psychology whether explicitly or implicitly inferred. Consequently, where theory recognises and attempts to address the curious “widespread phenomenon” of extra-dyadic sexual relationships (Buunk and Dijkstra, 2000: 317) the ‘aberrant’ practice of non-monogamy is routinely investigated as ‘adultery’ or ‘infidelity’ (e.g. Masters and Johnson, 1970; Pittman, 1989; Treas and Giesen, 2000). Where sexual/emotional non-monogamy or ‘secondary’ relationships are researched or commented on in mainstream theory these are the clandestine forms attended to as if no others exist. Thus against a presupposed and moralised standard, deviations in sexual practice and dyadic formation are almost always negatively theorised in psychology (the exception of Rogers, 1973, is discussed below). Extra-dyadic sex or multiple partnerships and a dislocation of love from sex are typically viewed as a universal threat to personal and relational stability (see Buunk and Dijkstra, 2000) or to social cohesion (Immerman and Mackey, 1999), not least in terms of their alleged threat to social health and the supposed negative impact on children.

2.7 Gender and sexuality

In the psychology of monogamous and non-monogamous individuals, as well as the knowledges built up around love, commitment, intimacy and so on, stereotypical depictions of gender and sexuality are predominant. Dating from the mid 1950s (e.g. Parson and Bales, 1955), the ‘intimate man’, autonomous and confident, has been characterised as emphasising shared activities rather than shared feelings, while the ‘intimate woman’, emotionally expressive and nurturing, has been depicted as preferring self-disclosure and the sharing of personal details. On this basis, men have been routinely understood as not being as ‘intimate’ as women, as less likely to label their close relationships as ‘intimate’, and as less capable of having ‘quality’ relationships (e.g. Hays, 1984; Williams, 1985; Griffin and Sparks, 1990). From the same evolutionary perspective, gender differentiations in the domain of coupledom have also involved assumptions to do with the sexual appetites of men and women, perceptions of the relationship between love and sex, displays of jealousy, the greater likelihood of men to engage in infidelity, and that men are more likely to be

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7 For feminist analyses of marriage that involve critiques of monogamy see: Rosa (1994); Robinson (1997), and Stelboum (1999).
distressed over a partner’s sexual infidelity while women are said to be more concerned about a partner’s emotional infidelity (Crooks and Baur, 1999; Buunk and Dijkstra, 2000; Fletcher, 2002; Hendrick, 2004; cf. Kitzinger and Powell, 1995, for a feminist critique of the engendering of infidelity).

Assumed sex differences, however, reflect gender stereotypes more than biological ‘truth’ (e.g. Julien et al, 1997). Empirical support for gender/sexual stereotypes has been weak, exaggerated and/or inconsistent (Parks and Floyd, 1996; Stainton Rogers and Stainton Rogers, 2001), and psychology generally reports greater across-gender similarity rather than difference (Hendrick, 2004). The mainstream perspective now seems to have settled on maintaining a notion of sex differences in terms of female and male expression of closeness and intimacy, but that these differential expressions neither restrict nor promote the capacity to have close/intimate relationships of equal worth and quality (e.g. Swain, 1989; Floyd, 1995). This, however, is like obtaining a fair outcome while maintaining the problematic stereotypes and the relations of power they give rise to.

In contrast to this, what has been advanced by feminist theorists in relation to the genderisation of coupledom are strong and important critiques of the patriarchal discourses and practices of love, romance, marriage and monogamy as political institutions that subordinate women and privilege both men and capitalism (e.g. Atkinson, 1974; Firestone, 1979; Rich, 1983; Pateman, 1988; Robinson, 1997). For example, post-structuralist feminists have attempted to understand and critique the discursive production and power of gendered subject positions in couple arrangements (both opposite and same sex), showing how taking up particular positions and deploying certain interpretative repertoires as opposed to others are the mainstays of hetero-patriarchal hegemony (e.g. Cancian, 1987; Hollway, 1989; Duncombe and Marsden, 1993; Wetherell, 1995; Dallos and Dallos, 1997; Dryden, 1999; Lawes, 1999; Gabb, 2001). Summarising the theoretical position of such feminist analyses, Wetherell writes that:

“Gender is not a matter of consistent, unitary, single identities…but develops from contradictory and frequently fragmentary pieces of discourse, repertoires and accounting systems available to individuals to make sense of their position, and

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8 For a recent and engaging (though not comprehensive) treatment of gender and sexuality in relation to coupledom, see the two special issues on marriage in Feminism and Psychology, 13(4), 2003; and 14(1), 2004 that focus on the debates around, and personal experiences of, marriage for heterosexual feminists (and their male partners) and lesbians and gay men.
which historically and contingently have come to be marked as feminine or masculine.”

(Wetherell, 1986; cited in Hollway, 1989: 136)

Feminist critiques of patriarchal marriage/partnership take this discursive arrangement and its gendered dynamics as one such ‘accounting system’ by which feminine and masculine subject positions are differently produced and constantly perpetuated (Hollway, 1989); a relational system that endows men with more power, justifies and strengthens male privilege, and that warrants the (complicit) subordination of women in relation to this (Atkinson, 1974). According to the feminist analyses (such as those cited above) the subjectification and subordination of women in heterosexual relationships occurs, for example, in the unequal division of (social and emotional) labour (Dryden, 1999), in the positioning of women as being in need of support and self-improvement (Worell, 1988), in the making of women as responsible for couple (dis)satisfactions and success (Maushart, 2001), in the obscuring of female ‘identity’ beyond romantic relationships (Gilbert and Walker, 1999) and many more worthy points of critique besides. A relatively recent example of a feminist post-structuralist analysis of gendered subjectivity and patriarchal power in (monogamous) heterosexual relationships is Stephenson et al’s (2000) exploration of the discursive practice of women’s ‘trustworthiness’ (a gendered and sexually specific construction of trust predicated on desiring no one other than her partner) as a form of female (sexual) subjectivity that not only makes women responsible for the success of a relationship and constitutes them as requiring greater surveillance than men, but also as reinforcing a phallocentric fantasy of masculine subjectivity as autonomous, non-risky, and controlled, for example. By this analysis Stephenson et al re-emphasise the argument posed by many post-structuralist (and other) feminists (e.g. Hollway, 1989; Butler, 1990; Ussher, 1997b; Dryden, 1999), that in heterosexual relationships (but not only here) the subjectivity of women reflects and continually confirms masculine privilege and power in being represented as the negative term of masculinity (see Malson, 1998).

Besides the construction and effects of gender differentials on the psychology of heterosexual relationships, from the mid 1970s mainstream research began attending to the effects of sexuality in terms of gay men, lesbians and their relationships (e.g. Saghir and Robins, 1973; Weinberg and Williams, 1975; Bell and Weinberg, 1978). What gay and lesbian couples did with sex was the typical question of early research but in 1978 Bell and Weinberg compiled the first ‘typology’ of gay (male) relationships. In line with a similar distinction
being made in opposite-sex marriage by sociologists at the time, Bell and Weinberg (1978) categorised gay relationships as ‘closed-coupled’ and as ‘open-coupled’. The ‘closed’ couple was described as happy, monogamous, emotionally bonded and as no different to opposite-sex couples in psychological adjustment. In their sexual non-monogamy, the ‘open’ couple was reported to be less happy and adjusted. These results come as no surprise given that the same criteria and measures of normative heterosexual adjustment and relationship satisfaction were applied (see Kitzinger, 1987).

Having conducted 156 interviews with male couples, McWhirter and Mattison (1984) identified equality and compatibility, particularly sexual compatibility, as the primary factors behind the ‘success’ of the gay relationship (defined as one lasting more than ten years). This in-depth survey and its promotion of gay couples as ‘bonded’ and ‘nesting’ was the first to receive the favourable attention of the gay community (Berger, 1990). The subsequent body of work concerning same-sex couples largely attempted to ascertain differences and/or similarities between straight and same-sex relationships, and between gay and lesbian couples (see Christopher and Sprecher, 2000; Peplau and Spaulding, 2000; Weeks et al., 2002; Fletcher, 2002; Hedrick, 2004). The primary focus for these various comparisons seems to have been on (a) sexual attitudes and behaviour, (b) the practices of intimacy, and (c) levels of commitment. Where differences have been reported, such as non-monogamy being more common in gay relationships and less common in lesbian couples than in opposite-sex relationships (Blumstein and Schwartz, 1983), or that lesbian relationships are more emotionally than sexually fused (e.g. Johnson, 1990; Kurdek, 1998), the consensus appears to be that ‘differences’ between same and opposite sex relationships is more closely linked to gender roles than sexual orientation (Fletcher, 2002; Mackey et al., 2000).

Regardless, however, of what differences or similarities were and are reported, or what they are seen to be a function of, the early research interest into gay and lesbian relationships seemed determined to qualify and legitimate these couples as being ‘happily married’. Gay men in particular may have been reported as not practicing a commitment of sexual fidelity as much as other groups but their sense of ‘emotional monogamy’ has been seen to balance this out in the production of a ‘stability’ that continues to be upheld as permanent exclusivity (Blumstein and Schwartz, 1983; Weeks et al., 2001). The point here is that much of the research into coupledom was concerned with different practices as a means of confirming a
hetero-dyadic tradition, or at least this was its effect, and it continues today (e.g. Mohr, 1999; Weeks et al, 2001). In many ways this can be seen as being no less true of the ‘open marriage’ literature of the 1970s that proposed a challenge to the traditional monogamous model. In the following section, then, I offer a survey and critique of the liberal-humanist argument underlying this body of work, proposing the point of view that a bid for open marriage and/or sexual liberation, while certainly confronting contractual and gender role prohibitions on the one hand, served to intensify regulation of coupledom around the concept of exclusive pair-bonding on the other.

2.8 An ‘alternative’ freedom

No doubt inspired by the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s and 1970s, sociological literature in particular was purporting the advantages and freedoms of ‘open’ (O’Neill and O’Neill, 1972), or ‘multilateral’ (Constantine and Constantine, 1973) marital arrangements. In the wake of the Kinsey reports (Kinsey et al, 1948, 1953) that pointed to sexual monogamy in America as being the exception rather than the rule, and in contrast to psychological theory that was stipulating the dangers of extra-dyadic sex, the idea that non-monogamy is associated with unsatisfactory and unstable marriages was targeted as debatable (e.g. Neubeck and Schetzler, 1962). Recasting the religious model of monogamous marriage and giving it secular, humanistic significance, a modified ‘monogamy’, a ‘better’ kind of relational maturity, and a reframing of interpersonal ‘goals’ for the purpose of self-relational authenticity were advanced by a number of psychosocial theorists in the early 1970s (e.g. O’Neill and O’Neill, 1972; DeLora and DeLora, 1972; Constantine and Constantine, 1973; Mazur, 1973; Rogers, 1973; Williams, 1974; Smith and Smith, 1974). Despite the rhetoric of openness, flexibility, new commitments and self-mutual discovery, the desired goal of these theorists was, above all, to ensure the permanence and emotional ‘authenticity’ of married and married-like couples. Thus while marriage could ostensibly be different, the essential ‘core’ of dyadic union was nevertheless to be maintained.

Closed marriage as a “culturally approved mass neurosis” (Mazur, 1973: 12) was challenged on a number of ethical grounds; namely as institutionalising gender and sexual stereotypes, as a form of possession, as a legitimised form of emotional and erotic bondage that prohibits wider intimate relations, and as the denial of authentic, autonomous identity. In short,
traditional marriage was attacked as neither realistic nor humane (Smith and Smith, 1974). While theorists differed in the extent to which they advocated non-monogamy as an inevitable aspect of the ‘new’ liberal-humanist marriage, they were not so disparate in regards to the benefits accompanying the new model. Throughout this body of work the choices, pursuits, authenticities and expectation of happiness that Bertrand Russell (1929) and others had in the 1920s advocated in relation to non-traditional marriage were similarly theorised as being possible on the explicit condition of a strong, consistent dyadic attachment that could not only withstand all experimentation and modification but would grow as a result. What was postulated was a form of ‘utopian monogamy’ (Mazur, 1973) wherein the ever-present couple-bond (dyadic and heterosexual) was seen to function as a “dynamic core with open-ended extensions” (Mazur, 1973: 118). The hegemony of dyadic connection was observed by Constantine and Constandine (1973) who (critically) reported ‘group marriage’ as involving two (or more) separate dyads acting as co-wives and co-husbands.

For Mazur (1973: 16), the “open-ended marriage is certainly monogamous” in terms of its commitment to permanence and intimate authenticity. In the very act of “celebrating the enduring and creative aspects of monogamy” (Mazur, 1973: 78) one was said to find genuine freedom. Similarly for O’Neill and O’Neill (1972: 40), “the theory of [closed marriage] is right, but the [monogamous] method is wrong.” And the theory, they suppose, is ‘right’ because one-to-one coupledom is an “underlying structural impulse” or natural human pattern (ibid.: 23). For these liberal sociologists, with the exception of the Constantines (1973) who were slightly more critical, dyadic “union grows stronger and richer through a new dynamic principle” (O’Neill and O’Neill, 1972: 41). Similarly articulating the psychological dynamics of this ‘enduring and creative’ principle, Carl Rogers (1973) was to emphasise the nature of liberal couple satisfactions that he predicted would by the year 2000 ensure the permanence and actualisation of heterosexual couples.

The humanist and individualist psychology of Rogers stipulated a ‘bonded’ couple-stability that is premised on a commitment to a relationship as an organic process, on risking the communication of one’s feelings, ceasing to live by roles, and on the discovery and exposure of one’s ‘real’ self. The subjects of this ‘stronger and richer union’ were encouraged to become the complexity of their feelings which they could rationally determine and effectively channel. They were to be committed to ‘working’ at the relationship as a vehicle for their
actualisation and freedom and to strike a mystical balance between autonomy and union. “It is almost like saying that the more separate you become, the greater is the chance for strong union” (Rogers, 1973: 212). Thus where extra-dyadic sex or ‘ancillary relationships’ were entered into it is was “precisely because a [couple’s] bond is so deep, so secure and so central to their lives [that] they can afford to open it up and let others in” (O’Neill and O’Neill, 1972: 177).

In these terms, the safe one-to-one ‘haven’ of attachment theory remains ever present. In the various recommendations of, and prescriptions for, sexual and marital ‘freedoms’ it is ultimately the centralised, durable, contained and ‘monogamous’ dyadic-bond that was to be privileged. As a result, the sociological image-repertoire blended easily with the concurrent psychology of monogamous intimacy, commitment and trust. More than debunking myths or overcoming traditional power relations, the regulatory force of dyadic exclusivity and its associated subjectivity were further enabled and consolidated by these enlightened theorists working for ‘liberation’. Monogamy was to have been desexualised (released from sex) but inasmuch as it was also being highly emotionalised, the governance of couples extended from mere sexual prohibition to using emotional ‘freedom’ (and emotional monogamy) as the means of (self)regulation. That is to say, the regulation that acts on us and that we act on ourselves moved from the policing and prohibition of (predominantly sexual) behaviour to the policing and prescriptions of feelings as the restrictions of traditional marriage are merely replaced with others that “seem more modern and attractive” (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995: 7). As discussed in later chapters, legalistic and contractual marriage may have been challenged during the cultural revolution of the 1960s and 70s but the emergent theorisation of ‘alternatives’ nevertheless remained limited by a pervasive, taken-for-granted adherence to the central law of ‘pairing’ and the fundamentality of dyadic emotional ‘bondedness’.

The discursive repertoires and ethical values that ‘open’ marriage theorists were mustering were to be reappraised in sociology some twenty years later (Giddens, 1992; Weeks 2000, Weeks et al, 2001; Bauman, 2003). Gidden’s now (in)famous postulations of a non-reproductive ‘plastic sexuality’ and the ‘confluent love’ of ‘pure relationships’ - together with Week’s celebration of ‘emotional monogamy’ as a form of relational experimentation - are a straightforward adoption of liberal-humanist theory in relation to “the involvement of individuals in determining the condition of their associations” (Giddens, 1992: 190). But for
these latter-day evangelists of couple/personal freedom it is gay and lesbian relationships that are celebrated as the vanguards of this “new balance between the desire for individual freedom and possibilities of commitment” (Weeks et al, 2001: 22; cf. Weeks, 2004) as if the struggle is somehow peculiar to ‘modernity’ and gay and lesbian relationships. Weeks et al (2001) positively regard the (generalised) willingness of a same-sex couple to negotiate trust and commitment but overlook ways in which these values function to govern experience and freedoms even when made flexible. In this redeployment of the 1970s desexualisation and emotionalisation of monogamy as a challenge to hetero-patriarchal morality and as a more enlightened predictor of couple success, the regulatory ideology as it exists at the level of the dyad (maintained as exclusive and all this obliges) is not fundamentally challenged. Rather critiques of traditional relationships can be seen as reinstating aspects of the regime of coupledom in the very alternatives being proposed. Principles such as bondedness, exclusivity, predictability, permanence, certainty and authenticity are not only guarded but intensified in this rationality of a revamped monogamy.

In sum, such a project for ‘new relationships’ explicitly reflected (and reflects) an advanced liberal mode of government in its “elaboration of a know-how of the autonomous individual striving for self-realisation” (Rose, 1999: 90) and the liberation of ‘natural’ desires and identity. As such, the ‘expertise’ of the sexual/relationship liberation theorists of the 1970s is to be treated cautiously as it spells out ‘new’ and ‘better’ methods of self-discovery and relationship potential while retaining traditional romantic assumptions. Indeed, as Foucault suggests (1978a, 1981b; cf. Kitzinger 1987; Stainton Rogers and Stainton Rogers, 2001), the recurrent alignment of personal freedom with sexual liberation and ‘new’ relational ethics is a very curious phenomenon in terms of its subtle power effects and its cultivation of the self-governing ethical subject who in ‘releasing’ its truth merely operates on itself according to the prescribed liberations of humanist ideals that regulate in the name of freedom. Rose (1999: 93) puts it this way:

“In striving to live our autonomous lives, to discover who we really are, to realise our potentials and shape our lifestyles, we become tied to the project of our own identity and bound in new ways into the pedagogies of expertise.”

Having outlined ways in which the psychosocial sciences have resisted and challenged but largely reinscribed the emotional exclusivity of marital/couple tradition, in the final section
of this review I outline ways in which social psychology has attempted to re-examine and re-theorise close/romantic relationships since the 1980s; theorisations that were not unaffected by the postmodern provocations impacting on social psychology at the time but which can nonetheless be differentiated from the discursive perspective taken up in this research. In tracing lines of research that were (and are) predicated on the attempt to develop the ‘social’ of social psychology and a branch of this that moves into what can be identified as ‘soft constructionism’, the post-structuralist approach employed in the ensuing analyses is justified as potentially overcoming some of the limitations of these ‘social’ and ‘dialogic’ approaches to the study of romantic relationships.

2.9 Towards a discursive perspective

In the edited volume of Gilmour and Duck (1986) as an example of the ‘emerging field of personal relationships’ that was being theorised in the social psychology of the early 1980s, divergent approaches to the research of intimate relationships that were in circulation at this time are articulated. The various approaches of this volume can be categorised as (a) a ‘social’ approach to the investigation of the assumed systematic laws of relationships (e.g. Kelley, 1986) and (b) a ‘constructionist’ approach that is centred on a view of relationships as rhetorical, linguistic and metaphoric phenomenon (e.g. Ginsberg, 1986).

The ‘social’ approach as articulated by Kelley (1986; cf. Berscheid, 1999) can be briefly summarised as one which seeks to determine both the psychological and social structures/processes underlying relational experience in order to develop scientific knowledge of the subject matter. The ‘individual’ who is traditionally positioned centre stage as the origin and locus of social relationships (as we have witnessed so far in this review of psychological literature) remains the agentic, rational and unitary subject who instigates his or her own judgements and abilities and who generates all meaning and perceptions of social ‘reality’. Hence the ‘social’ approach of mainstream social psychology remains interested in the attitudes, traits and qualities that the individual brings to a relationship for it to work, seeking out naturally occurring ‘patterns of interaction’ and ‘principles of formation’ (Kelley,

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9 See Henriques et al (1984) for a critique of a ‘social’ approach that perpetuates the fallacious individual-social divide; a dualistic conceptual framework that has a pervasive effect on psychological knowledge and that ultimately serves and confirms existing social relations.
1986) so that science can effectively understand and intervene in how both individuals and society are organised, develop, and function (ibid.).

A contrasting perspective (Ginsberg, 1986) takes the view that interpersonal relationships are produced and maintained according to cultural guidelines of intelligibility and acceptability. Not explicitly working within the conceptual framework of the individual-social dualism – although its shadow remains evident – this more critical approach understands the romantic relationship (and others) not as an effect of causal cognitive processes owned by rational economic decision makers oriented towards favourable outcomes but of culture and history and the systematic statements produced therein. Instead of theorising relational components such as trust, exclusivity and openness as natural, given and inherent properties of a relationship, Ginsberg argues that these can be seen as culturally available linguistic devices that are used to create or affirm a relationship and on this basis calls for an analysis of relationships that attends to ways in which identity and morality are constituted in relationships and the social mechanisms that modulate them.

Ginsberg’s approach is seemingly prompted by the early work of critical theorists such as Harré and Secord (1972) and Shotter (1984) who as part of the paradigm shift (a turning to language) that influenced a group of social psychologists at this time (e.g. Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Parker, 1989; cf. Parker and Shotter, 1990) came to conceptualise relationships as ‘conversational realities’ and as being produced in culturally and historically sedimented speech acts; that is, as being produced in the conversations and dialogues people have with each other. Here production of relationships is neither a matter of psychological or social processes but of ways of talking about relationships and of the language that makes available these ways of talking. Thus these theorists argue that more attention should be paid to what people actually say in and about their relationships in an interaction that is not based on the individual-social (private-public) binary but on rhetorical symbolism, metaphor and repertoire. Shotter (1993a) later argues, for example, that the experience of an ‘intimate’ knowledge of ourselves and others in relationships is constituted by socio-historically fashioned modes of speech; that the ways in which we experience relationships and ourselves in them is the effect of discursively constructed realities. Gaining some momentum within mainstream social psychology particularly from the late 1980s, the idea of relationships as the product of conversational speech acts is taken up by theorists such as Duck (1993, 1997, 1998) and Hendrick (1989).
Despite a move to understanding relationships and their assumed ‘components’ as linguistic effects, as rhetorical interchange, and as representative of systematic statements governed by cultural norms and rules, Duck and Pond (1989), for example, adopt this perspective as a way of clarifying the psychological ‘nature’ of relationships and of revealing underlying emotions, relying heavily on empiricist ‘discoveries’. Truth is still taken to be a blend of what empiricist research has already discovered. Prevalent in this type of theorising that can be identified as ‘soft (phenomenological) constructionism’ there is still the idea that the ‘real’ nature of relationships is reflected in the psychology of the agentic, rational and unitary individual. While Duck and Pond assert that ‘talk’ and communication is instrumental in bringing relationships about and in producing a ‘large part’ of their character, ‘talk’ in this kind of theorising is taken as that which presents or reflects individual and social ‘reality’.

There is, however, a significant conceptual difference between a language that reflects social reality and a language that constructs and regulates it, as discussed in the following chapter in relation to post-structuralism and discourse theory.

Duck talks about language as the “medium through which many relationship activities are conducted” (Duck, 1998: 5), but there is not the same kind of emphasis that Shotter (1993a, 1993b), for instance, gives to language (discourse) as that which constitutes relationships, couple-identities and our knowledge of these. Although Duck is cognisant of the ideological cultural scripts that shape relational talk and experience – narratives of love, monogamy and jealousy, for example - people and relationships are seen as being merely influenced rather than constituted by them. Commonsensical relational ‘pathways’ to do with how relationships develop and work are recommended and Duck suggests that we can learn about what is ‘good’ in ‘stable’ relationships by attending to these pathways, commonalities and trends as if what is ‘good’ is somehow anterior to the language of relationships. Thus the perspective is limited in that language has a partial influence with no exploration or critique of the ideologies, principles and systems of thought that are encoded in the various narratives we adopt to enact ourselves and our relationships. In a soft constructionism that maintains the individual-social and cause-effect dualisms it’s enough that narratives simply influence people without exploring their function and productive power.
Other critical theorists adopting a more critical constructionist paradigm and employing the qualitative method of ‘discourse analysis’ have rejected the view of relationships as a “social or psychic entity which exists independently of conversation such that it can be accurately observed, described, diagnosed and operated upon” (Lawes, 1999: 13). Together with a number of conceptual and methodological departures from the positivist/quantitative perspective (such as the conversational approach of Duck, 1998 and Hendrick, 1989) a discursive analytic approach questions the idea of coherent, relatively static and individually owned ‘attitudes’ to romantic partnership “given the conspicuous inconsistency (or flexibility) which saturates the accounts produced by individual respondents” (Lawes, 1999: 16; cf. Stenner, 1993). Using discourse analysis to deconstruct the constitutive and regulative (gendered) discourse of romantic love, for example, Wetherell (1995: 134) argues that:

“The words instead are second-hand, already in circulation, already familiar, already there, waiting for the moment of appropriation…[People in love] recognise their experience and determine its quality through the words which are available.”

To see words (language, conversation and discourse) as thoroughly determining the experience of romantic love and other qualities of coupledom is very different from seeing words as merely reflecting social reality and personal experience (as pointed out above in reference to the later work of Duck wherein words are accredited as having a ‘large influence’ on experience). Concerned with the words and language of coupledom, critical analysis of discourse and discursive practices can go further than a limited focus on the immediate function of interpersonal dialogue. And it can do so by its attempts to “link discourse with power and ideology, showing how specific forms of language lend themselves to particular political and ideological interests” (Crawford, 2004: 66). In this way a discursive treatment of coupledom, particularly one driven by post-structuralist theory, can highlight ways in which the couple regime prioritises certain ‘qualities’ and ways of living, certain modes of ‘success’, stabilities and securities, and certain subjectifications over others in the enactment of a constitutive body of knowledge(s) and complex web of power relations. In short, a post-structuralist discursive analysis of the couple domain makes possible a reappraisal of couple relationships as those in which an “incessant ambiguity gives way to a sense of worthy purpose” (Gergen and Gergen, 2003: 472, referring to their own experience of marriage). It is this ‘sense of worthy purpose’ and the various qualities that are deployed
to elicit such a sense of worth and worthiness that analyses of chapters four to seven aim to deconstruct and problematise.

2.10 Conclusion

While orthodox psychology has presented us with particular ways of understanding and of *doing* coupldom these are by no means the only ones by which we can understand the experience(s) or ourselves in it. Yet from a mainstream perspective the couple relationship is viewed and essentialised as a relatively invariable construct or ‘naturally’ occurring entity whose typifying, normalised and normalising (universal) characteristics and qualities, assumed to originate with the individual, can be accurately and objectively measured through scientific enquiry. This review of the psychological architecture of the couple domain has outlined and critiqued the dominant components and qualities that are commonly deployed in theory and in everyday practice to mark out and steer the conventional couple experience towards ‘success’ and ‘stability’. In the process, something of the geography of the psychologised coupled-subject has been laid out in preparation for the analyses that follow. The ‘healthy’, normalised (gendered and sexual) subject of the couple domain is depicted as a moral, emotional and economic decision maker, as being oriented to ‘favourable’ outcomes of well-being and security, as responsibly fulfilling individually owned capacities and needs, and as continually engaged in a series of self-examinations, self-disclosures, preparations and behaviours that are believed to reflect what it is to be human in its ‘complete’ form.

I have sought to emphasise the unitary and specific nature of the couple relationship that psychology has come to reify and scientifically confirm using a specific cohort of people in traditional heterosexual, monogamous relationships by way of investigative procedures that are assumed to reveal the objective truth about the ‘normative’ operation of couple interaction and of individuals. And I have suggested that ‘alternative’ configurations do not necessarily represent a substantive difference to this hetero-dyadic blueprint, introducing the argument that ‘alternative’ constructions, paradigms and experience (those of same-sex, non-monogamous, and non-dyadic relationships) do not demonstrate or propose a progressive and unproblematic challenge to the orthodoxy of monogamously bonded pairing as authorised by the couple matrix. As developed in chapters five to seven, the normative constructions, knowledges and values of coupldom can be seen as being intensified in so-called counter movements as well as in a naïve insistence on personal freedoms and
emotionally intimate relationships that cultivate more subtle forms of power and regulation in relation to who we are and what we do in our 'liberated' partnerships. Above all it has been posited, and will continue to be argued, that forms of mutual regulation, self-monitoring and productive, disciplinary power are mobilised and justified within the very qualities and values that are said to drive our relationships and ourselves forward to a place of healthy maturity, secure interdependence and fulfilled promises. In psychology’s investigation of coupledom in terms of its normalising patterns, trajectories, outcomes, emotions and technologies – all ‘necessarily’ deployed for the attainment of ‘successful’, ‘stable’ and ‘satisfying’ relationships - the ‘truth’ and ‘goodness’ of typical couple interactions are not being revealed so much as conjured and privileged as a means of mutual and self governance. The objectified components of the couple relationship are not separate and coherent practices each with their own inherent properties and unique function. On the contrary, the valorised qualities of love, sex, intimacy, commitment, trust and so on, can be reinterpreted as interconnected elements of a broader socio-historically specific power-knowledge, one that is activated by a particular political rationality that psychology only serves to foster in its explanations, classifications, solutions and identification of problems. In this chapter the identification of ‘stable’ relationships as a socio-political solution to post World War Two conditions was particularly traced as a backdrop to the shaping of post-war psychological research and theory.

Thus what it is to love, be committed and intimate are socially useful and scientifically valorised standards that have come bear the imprint of truth and freedom in the service of a specific political position. Such relational qualities can be seen as the rules and techniques we are encouraged to adopt so as to “help bring order to this inherently disorderly realm of couple experience” (Charles, 2002). In these terms, when we engage in couple relationships we do more than practice a naturally occurring repertoire and simply interact with another; we are also constituted and regulated by the productive power of the repertoire and its moral-ethical prescriptions whereby we and our relationships are stabilised and ordered in specific ways. Indeed, social psychology’s investigation of romantic relationships reflects more than a mere concern for ‘human nature’ but in fact manufactures a “particular form or arrangement of relations between ourselves” (Stainton Rogers et al, 1995: 90): an arrangement that is tied to certain politico-economic positions and that ‘humanises’ us in accordance with it. Stainton Rogers, Stenner, Gleeson and Stainton Rogers (1995)
understand the ‘humaneering’ of mainstream social psychology as a ‘do-gooding’ missionary quest to boldly go and “seek out sound knowledge of human behaviour in order to make social institutions and practices better suited to human needs” (ibid. 2-3). As these authors argue, the humaneering of social psychology is no mere quest for scholarship but is a value-laden, ideological endeavour of ‘human betterment’ with far reaching political effects in that “to get the ‘goodies’ on offer requires buying into the ideology with which they are associated” (ibid.: 5).

In her recent publication, prominent relationship theorist Susan Hendrick reflects this kind of ‘do-gooding’ evangelism in her authorial intention and mission statement:

“As you read this book, it is intended that you will realise all the knowledge you already have about how relationships work; that you will learn new information; and that you will understand how to engage in your own relationships with greater satisfaction.”

(Hendrick, 2004: 2-3)

By the mere mention of a ‘greater satisfaction’ to be offered by the authoritative knowledge, didactic wisdom and empiricist ‘expertise’ of psychology, we should not be grateful for assistance with a better understanding of our relationships so much as cautious of its truth claims. Armed with a missionary zeal and reliant on the presumption that experimental and observational methods can accurately reveal the consistent and universal ‘essences’ of social and psychological phenomenon, Hendrick is one of many mainstream social psychologists who set about filling in the gaps of our knowledge, offering up its insight as the means towards better, more ‘satisfying’ and more ‘stable’ marriages and couple relationships. The ‘humaneering’ that is explicit in this manual for ‘better’ relationships is one that ties us to the couple matrix and its ideology as we are enticed to realise, learn and understand the terms of relational ‘satisfaction’ in the ways prescribed by those who supposedly know in order to fully experience its ostensible benefits. In the following chapter’s outline of the non-positivist, poststructuralist epistemology adopted in this research, reasons for being necessary cautious of such a zealous advancement of orthodox psychological knowledge are further stipulated.
CHAPTER THREE

Post-structuralism, discourse and method

“Expressing their thoughts in words of which they are not the masters, enclosing them in verbal forms whose historical dimensions they are unaware of, men believe that their speech is their servant and do not realise that they are submitting to its demands…Hence the need to work one’s way back from opinions, philosophies, and perhaps even from sciences, to the words that made them possible.”

Michel Foucault (1970: 324)

“What would we do without the idea of the Real Thing, the ‘real’ relationship? We would have to compare everything with everything else…it domesticates the infinite.”

Adam Phillips (1996: #52)

3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter’s review of (social) psychological knowledge and its totalising and reifying truth claims in regard to the components, processes, and values of the couple experience, the positivist and empiricist paradigm within which such claims are routinely made and quantified was critiqued as one that problematically advances a realist and essentialist explanation of social behaviour. Traditional research was briefly contrasted with a qualitative perspective that despite methodological variation is contextual, linguistic and interpretive in approach. Qualitative methods are interpretive inasmuch as they refuse the notion of an unmediated relation between the world and the investigation of it (Burman, 1997)\(^1\). As briefly outlined in chapter two, in this linguistic and constructionist paradigm (dating from the late 1960s and early 1970s: e.g. Garfinkel, 1967; Gergen, 1973; Shotter, 1975; Harré, 1979) as one concerned with the productivity of language, rhetoric and discourse, the idea of social or psychological decontextualised ‘entities’ (objects or subjects) that somehow exist outside of conversation, talk, and discourse is rejected.

In this chapter I explicate further the theoretical premise of the discursive paradigm and its key concepts. It has to be said, however, that since the rise of the ‘new paradigm’ in social psychology the various understandings of ‘discourse’ and the various developments of discourse analysis makes it impossible to talk of them as unitary and coherent perspectives either theoretically or methodologically. While the ‘micro’ and ‘macro’ approaches to the analysis of discourse are briefly compared so as to clarify the more macro position adopted here, I do not attempt a comprehensive account of the various perspectives and methodological manifestations of discourse analysis. My discussion is to focus on the philosophical orientation and prime theoretical precepts of post-structuralist, Foucauldian discourse theory and discourse analysis as applied in this current research. In particular, what this chapter outlines is the post-structuralist take on the generation of knowledge and its relationship to truth, power and social practice, and the discursive framings of subjectivity; that is, the condition of being made up as a certain type of person/human being in the subjectification to discourse. The two related qualitative studies of (a) an etymological analysis or semantic history of the present discursive field of coupledom and (b) a discourse analysis of ways in which present practices are spoken about are introduced later in this chapter with the rationales, aims and procedures for both studies being outlined.

3.2 Post-structuralism

Post-structuralism is a philosophical theory of knowledge and an interdisciplinary epistemology. Post-structuralist philosophy can generally be said to have proceeded from the anti-historicism of Nietzsche and his problematisation of Truth (e.g. Nietzsche, 1887a), Lacan’s (1949) fictioning of the ‘self’, and the 1970s and 1980s post-Saussurean linguistic theories of Foucault, Derrida and Barthes. In brief, post-structuralist theory involves critique of metaphysics, truth and causality; it challenges conventional understandings of knowledge, language, power, identity and subjectivity and (to varying degrees) proposes possibilities for social and subjective change (see Dews, 1987; Sarup, 1988; Kvale, 1992).

The ‘post’ prefix differentiates this school of thought from the structuralism of Saussure, Lacan, Althusser and Lévi-Strauss wherein ‘truth’ is taken to reside behind or within texts and structures (e.g. linguistic, psychic or socio-economic) that are thought of as well-fitting, rounded and stable ‘totalities’ (Henriques et al, 1984). But as Sarup (1988: 2) writes, “[o]ne
can see that a wholesale attack on the subject [beginning with structuralism, particularly Lacan’s non-humanist theory of a decentred subjectivity] was in due course bound to subvert the notion of structure as well.” Though different, there are nevertheless continuities and similarities between the two philosophical schools. Besides critiques of the human subject, both structuralism and post-structuralism also propose challenges to traditional philosophy, historicism, and the generation of meaning (Sarup, 1988; Kvale, 1992). In this brief synopsis of post-structuralism as the philosophical underpinning of the epistemology I adopt, its particular treatment and critique of these traditions are outlined as a grounding for the subsequent discussions of Foucauldian discourse theory and the analytic method of discourse analysis.

Post-structuralism is often identified with ‘deconstruction’ (a display and displacement of the constructed naturalness of a text and its taken-for-granted truth; see Derrida, 1976) and is a particular philosophic orientation taken in regards to the generation of knowledge and the relationship between the knower and the known, or between subject and object. Besides asking ‘how can we know’, a post-structuralist epistemology also incorporates questions of methodology and means of validation in asking ‘how do we know what we know?’ Yet within post-structuralism there is no simple correlation between ontology and epistemology (Parker, 1990a) as implied in the positivist (scientific) approach. Post-structuralism radically problematises the relationship between the generation and procurement of knowledge and the assertion of reality/truth (Foucault, 1970, 1972, 1973a, 1977e). Thus the ‘post’ movement denies any stable correspondence between propositions and reality and implies “a perpetual detour on the way to a truth that has lost any status or finality” (Sarup, 1988: 3).

The post-structuralist ‘turn to language’ is marked by its emphasis on the centrality of language (and discourse) to both meaning and identity. The signified (that which is denoted) is downplayed and the signifier (the linguistic system of denotation) is made dominant (Henriques et al, 1984; Dewes, 1987; Sarup, 1988). In other words, “our language determines our view of reality because we see things through it” (Pears, 1971: 13; emphasis added). Language does not objectively describe the reality of the world, objects or subjects but is constructive of these and their assumed realities (Henriques et al, 1984; Parker, 1989; Potter and Wetherell, 1987) Language, then, is taken not as a transparent conveyor of identifiable ‘reality’ and absolute ‘truth’ but as constituting what is taken to be reality and truth. For Hall
(1982) a post-structuralist view of language “implies the active work of selecting and presenting, of structuring and shaping; not merely the transmitting of an already-existing meaning, but the more active labour of making things mean” (cited in Malson, 1998: 226). Hence the implication is that nothing can be known outside of or prior to language and its division into discourses. In this epistemology, then, both knowledge and truth are considered to be socially and discursively constructed and are thus transient and unstable.

In this way post-structuralism (often coinciding with postmodernism though this association is controversial; see Kvale, 1992) radically challenges the dominant values and paradigms of ‘modernism’ (associated with eighteenth century Enlightenment). It opposes a positivist science born out of modernism where “there is only one reality to describe and explain” (Fletcher, 2002: 24) and where it is assumed that a singular ‘reality’ can be described and explained outside of the language that constructs it and that renders it knowable. Post-structuralism, like postmodernism, does not adhere to the modernist precept of the progress and certainty of science, reason, subjectivity and society, but posits multiple ‘realities’, contingency, perspectivism, uncertainty and ambiguity (Wetherell et al, 2001a). So to enter the field of language, or more specifically the realm of discourse and discursive practice, is to enter into debates about the foundation on which knowledge is built, subjectivity is constructed and society is managed. These are debates about the nature of meaning (Wetherell et al, 2001a). Within this epistemology it is in and through language (characterised as ‘discourse’) that knowledge and meaning are constructed and productive power flourishes.

Morawski (1990) summarises the perspective in this way:

“Perhaps the chief feature is a general disclaiming of the search for enduring, absolute, or universal truths; these dubitable truths include the existence of a stable, autonomous knower, the possibilities of objective, disinterested knowledge, the existence of logic, rationality, or reason that is independent of a social system endorsing these mental processes, and the feasibility of referential language to describe reality.”

(Morawski; cited in Stainton Rogers and Stainton Rogers, 2001: 148)

As suggested by this, the post-structuralist perspective not only takes language as the medium through which knowledge, truth, and objects are constructed, but also as the medium by which institutions, social relations and identities are made known. Highly
significant to post-structuralist thought is indeed the idea that there is no ‘knowing subject’ independent of language. In this paradigm the term ‘subject’ is not referring to the classical Cartesian conception of the unitary subject or ‘individual’ that presupposes people to be free, autonomous, intellectual agents whose thinking processes are not coerced by historical or cultural circumstances (Sarup, 1988; Hall, 1996). While Descartes presents a picture of the human subject as speaking without simultaneously being spoken, post-structuralism posits that there is no subject who is not first spoken into being. Post-structuralists, like Foucault, deconstruct the classic conceptions of the ‘self’ and ‘consciousness’ as authoritative sites for meaning and truth and rethink these as historically and culturally specific discursive constructions as Foucault’s theory of discourse and discursive practices makes clear. As discussed further below, and as a prime point of departure for the ensuing analyses, the ‘self’ of post-structuralism is the product of historically constituted, contextually specific, and fluctuating relations of power and social practice.

“The self does not pre-exist the forms of its social recognitions; it is a heterogeneous and shifting resultant of the social expectations targeted upon it, the social duties accorded it, the norms according to which it is judged, the pleasures and pains that entice and coerce it, the forms of self-inspection inculcated in it, the language according to which it is spoken about and about which it learns to account for itself in thought and speech.”

(Rose, 1989: 222)

That is to say, the heterogeneous and shifting ‘self’ does not exist prior to, or outside of, the language that produces and speaks it into being and according to which it learns to understand and know itself. And neither does it pre-exist or come to account for itself outside of socio-politically scripted norms, psychologies and ‘technologies of selfhood’ (Foucault, 1988) that impose and require specific forms of self-recognition and self-expectation.

3.3 Discourse and discursive practices

As Walkerdine (1986) and Potter et al (1990) point out, the term ‘discourse’ is taken up by contrasting theoretical perspectives and so has come to mean very different things. As it is a Foucauldian perspective of discourse that is adopted by this research, it is the proponents of his approach that are to be elucidated here. By ‘discourse’ Foucault is not referring to
language alone or to a mere linguistic concept connected to speech or writing but to sets of enunciative (speakable) statements that recur in talk and texts of all kinds and in different historical periods, and contexts, where they take on different configurations (Foucault, 1972). Discourses are made up of a limited number of statements that are linked together in a single (loosely unified) linguistic formation and for which specific conditions of emergence and existence can be found, as demonstrated in the etymological analysis of chapter four. Paraphrasing a frequently quoted line of Foucault’s, discourses systematically form the objects, the individuals, bodies, and experiences of which they speak (Foucault, 1972: 49). And as they form objects and subjects, discourses are more than mere linguistic phenomenon but have material effects (see Ussher, 1977a).

Foucault understands discourses – economic, religious, medical, biological, psychiatric and psychological, for example - as historically specific, regulated systems of statements (foundational narratives of a society) that both constitute and regulate knowledge and social practices such as morality, madness, punishment and sexuality, though the list is endless. For Foucault, discourses and discursive practices do not consist of one statement, text, action or point of origin but appear across a range of texts and conducts and in various forms. He stipulates that discourses consist of a hypothesised unity that is always provisional. “We must conceive of discourse as a series of discontinuous segments whose tactical function is neither uniform or stable” (Foucault, 1972: 124). Discourses, then, do not refer to a single object formed once and for all. Thus a different discourse, enabled by a different episteme (an historically specific way of thinking or knowing; Foucault, 1970) with the power and authority to regulate social practices in new ways, can emerge and dislocate an existing one, producing a modified or new discursive formation, knowledge and practice.

A group of statements provide a language for talking about - and representing the knowledge about – a particular topic, object or subject at a particular historical time (Hall, 2001). For example, a romantic discourse constructs a knowledge of couple relationships as being about redemption, wholeness and the certainty of closure (Wetherell, 1995). And an economic discourse constructs a specific knowledge of people as seeking balances and satisfactions for needs and desires and as striving to contain conflict (Foucault, 1970). In the previous chapter’s discussion of couple-commitment I highlighted the effects of an economic discourse as it converges with the psychological and romantic discourses (and
others) to produce a particular knowledge of the psychologised coupled-subject in social exchange and equity theory – one who is construed as a rational, emotional, and economic decision maker intent on favourable outcomes. Constructive of knowledge and social life, discourses actively *produce* objects, worlds, minds and social relations. That is, a discourse “finds a way of limiting its domain, of defining what it is talking about, of giving it the status of an object – and therefore of making it manifest, nameable, and describable” (Foucault, 1972: 41).

In that discourses produce particular circuits of knowledge-power, they limit, restrict or render unknowable other possible ways of talking, thinking and behaving in relation to a constructed field of knowledge or object. Thus discourses also have both *disciplinary* and *disciplining* effects. As further discussed in chapter four:

> “Discipline not only consists in a way of organizing social life according to rational thought, exactitude, and supervision, it also embraces a mode of personal existence within such practices. It entails a training in the minute arts of self-scrutiny, self-valuation, and self-regulation.”

(Rose, 1989: 228)

Discourses, then, are disciplinary and productive in that they enable and constrain fields of knowledge and inquiry, govern what can meaningfully be said and talked about, done and thought within those fields (Foucault, 1972, 1981a). They are functional (Potter and Wetherell, 1987), inhibiting and productive (Hook, 2001), and rhetorical and persuasive (Billig, 1991). Discourse theory asks why this version of things, why this particular utterance or ‘reality’ without implying an underlying hidden ‘truth’. And it considers the functionality of discourse in terms of the status of the speaker and the socio-cultural, historical, spatial, and institutional contexts (such as hospitals, asylums and laboratories) from which statements are made or discourses spoken.

> “We must grasp the statement in the exact specificity of its occurrence; determine its condition of existence, fix at least its limits, establish its correlations with other statements that may be connected with it, and show what other forms of statement it excludes… The question…might be formulated in this way: what is the specific existence that emerges from what is said and nowhere else?”

(Foucault, 1972: 30-31).
In such terms, what we know, what we say and think, and how we conduct ourselves in our couple relationships and elsewhere, can be seen as the effects of historically specific repertoires of knowledge and practice that emerge from a series of already-in-place discursive correlations, authorisations, exclusions, and conditions (or contingencies) of possibility. That is to say, the experience exists because it has been discursively formulated and organised (psychologically, historically, legally, economically and so on) in one way and not another. It is, then, this specific organisation of statements to do with the couple domain and the rules grounding their enunciation that the group of verbal performances by which we know and act the experience is made possible, produced and mediated.

Besides consisting of sets of loosely unified, systematic statements, Foucault also theorises the discursive domain as involving discursive practices. While ‘discourse’ can be read as referring to the organised grouping of statements, discursive practices can be seen as referring to their operation. That is, discursive practices are the translation of discourses into social action; they are the enactment of discourse. They are the discursively inscribed, ordered regularities of behaviour that underscore discourses as social action (Fairclough, 1989). Discourses, then, are made intelligible from the behavioural patterns manifest in the discursive practices that discourses (constructed knowledges) give rise to (Wetherell et al., 2001a). Ways in which objects come into being and are constituted is thus dependent on the knowledge of the ‘thing’ as established by discourse at the institutional level and on the discursive practice by which this knowledge is invoked and made social action (Walkerdine, 1986; Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Parker, 1992). In this way, discursive practices have been defined as the ‘institutionalised use of language’, as all the ways in which people actively engage in the social and psychological realities as marked out and made available by the discursive generation of knowledge (Davies and Harré, 1990). According to discourse theory, as we inevitably engage with and enact (as well as further produce) discourses through practising them, we are being constituted and disciplined at the same time. It was only after a certain definition and understanding of ‘madness’, for example, was made a possibility and came to exit as an object through its discursive construction and ‘knowledging’ and then put into practice as that object that the consequent subject of ‘the madman’ could appear (Hall, 2001; see

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2 Early language theorists also influencing the development of discourse analysis (Wittgenstein, 1958; Austin, 1962; Sacks, 1992) were similarly concerned with language as a form of social activity in which talk and utterances do things and thus involve an essential ‘action-orientation’.
Foucault, 1973a). So, as Harré and Davies (1990: 43) put it, “among the products of discursive practices are the very persons who engage in them.”

### 3.4 Subjected subjects

As mentioned above, significant to post-structuralism, and one of the more radical propositions of Foucauldian discourse theory, is that knowledge and action do not originate with or exclusively reside in the psychological subject. The individual is not the determiner of what is or can be spoken. The theory stipulates that when individuals speak “they do not create their own language, but…use terms which are culturally, historically and ideologically available” (Billig, 2001: 217). For Foucault (1972: 61) “it is neither by recourse to a transcendental subject nor by recourse to a psychological subjectivity that the regulation of its enunciation should be defined.”

“Discourse is not the majestically unfolding manifestation of a thinking, knowing, speaking subject, but, on the contrary, a totality, in which the dispersion of the subject and his discontinuity with himself may be determined.”

( Ibid.: 55).

Thus the subject is displaced as the centre and author of representation and loses its privileged position in relation to meaning (Hall, 2001). We are produced within discourse, personify and embody it, and remain subjected to it. “Subjects may produce particular texts, but they are operating within the limits of the episteme, the discursive formation, the regime of truth of a particular period and culture” (Ibid.: 79).

Using such a perspective that locates subjectivity and subjectification as a function of discourse and discursive practices, the idea of the conscious, self-contained, unitary and relatively static individual who harbours consistent ‘attitudes’ believed to determine behaviour and mirror ‘reality’ has been thoroughly deconstructed from a discursive point of view within critical (constructionist and post-structuralist) social psychology (e.g. Hirst and Woolley, 1982; Henriques et al, 1984; Walkerdine, 1986; Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Edwards

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3 By the psychoanalytic term ‘subjectivity’, Henriques et al (1984) are referring to the ‘condition of being a subject/person’. Rose (1996b) refers to ‘subjectification’ as not solely implying domination or subordination but as also designating the processes of being ‘made up’ as a certain type of person or human being. Thus in their use of the latter term, post-structuralist theorists are referring to ‘subjectification to discourse’. 
and Potter, 1992; Shotter and Gergen, 1989). Discourses do not simply describe individuals but actively produce ‘identities’ in the various subject positions conjured in and by discourse (Hollway, 1989; Davies and Harré, 1990; Burman and Parker, 1993). From a discursive perspective, then, subjectivity is not about interiority, intra-physic essence or authenticity but about the constitution and reconstitution of people in discourse (Malson, 1998). I want to also highlight my position that besides analysing subjectivity in terms of subject positionings that can often infer the notion of agency (e.g. Davies and Harré, 1990), it is necessary to analyse subjectivity as technological. By this I mean that from a Foucauldian perspective subjectivity is also about the particular relations we have with ourselves as people as determined by (discursively delivered) technologies or processes of selfhood with ‘technologies’ referring to ways of working on one’s self to transform or produce oneself as a particular form of subject (Foucault, 1988; Haraway, 1991; Rose, 1996a, 1996b). Thus I take ‘identity’ or ‘selfhood’ as the product of different, mutable, and often contradictory subject positions and as the consequence of technologies of the self that are constructed by and made available through ideological and historically embedded discourses that determine appropriate subject positions in terms of what it is to be ‘human’.

To understand the subject as being constructed in and through discourse in this way is not, however, to imply that people are also merely passive and cannot resist certain oppressive subject positions. Opposing construction to the active agent or subject is to assume a false opposition and overlooks power as that which assumes and requires the active agency (as a form of ‘freedom’) of those on whom power is exercised and exercised through. As Butler argues (1990), construction is the very basis of agency and makes intervention possible. Thus challenges to relationships of power can emerge from within the very subject positions these relations make available (Henriques et al, 1984; see the discussion of power below).

‘Subject positions’ are the (discursive and institutional) positions from where we speak, the slots we occupy in culturally recognised patterns of talk and with which we make sense of ourselves, our motives, reactions and emotions as a gendered or sexualised subject, for example (Wetherell et al, 2001a). ‘Technologies of selfhood’, moreover, are ‘hybrid assemblages of knowledges, instruments, systems of judgement, buildings and spaces’, and so on, through which we “are governed and govern ourselves as human beings of a particular sort” (Rose, 1996b: 144) - as “creatures of freedom, of liberty, of power, of self-
Thus the discursive concepts of ‘subjectification’ to discourse and ‘subject positions’ stipulate that to know anything about ourselves is to know it in terms of any number of positions that are taken up and to which we develop an emotional commitment as we also invest in the moral system organised around those positions (Hollway, 1989; Davies and Harré, 1990). But the point I am making here is also that according to Foucault’s theorising of subjectivity we can move beyond merely highlighting the construction, diversity and fragmentation of subjects in subject positions and make links with the technologies, regulatory ideals, and ethical vocabularies of ‘autonomy, freedom, choice, authenticity, enterprise, fulfilment, responsibility, and lifestyle’ (Rose, 1996b) by which people are not only positioned, but positioned in relation to history, ethical modes of self-conduct, and political authority. Walkerdine (1986) and Frosh et al (2003), amongst others, are similarly critical of a theorisation of subjectivity that is merely about the sum total of positions in discourse. In theorising subjectivity as not only constituted by a plurality of positions but as also technologised (or directed), issues like ‘desire’ that affect the taking up of some positions over others can be theorised as the product of an historically located human subject who is first accredited with the ability to desire in specific ways and endowed with particular needs and ethical properties. Thus, in a concern for politics and ideology some (mainly feminist) post-structuralist theorists have used Lacanian psychoanalytic concepts (e.g. ascension to the Symbolic, imaginary ‘wholeness’, the unconscious and the phallic nature of signification) to understand the investments or trajectories behind gendered subject positionings and the regulation of femininity (e.g. Hollway, 1989; Malson, 1998; Hollway and Jefferson, 2000) and masculinity (Frosh et al, 2003, see also Billig, 1999; Parker, 2001). In this way the process of subjectification is more thoroughly explored as a function of power. While I do not adopt a Lacanian way of thinking about the taking up of subjectivity I am similarly concerned for
ways in which subjectivity is produced, technologised and politically directed in manifold relations of power.

3.5 The operation of power

According to Foucauldian theory, discourses do more than designate things and “it is this ‘more’ that we must reveal and describe” (Foucault, 1972: 54). Marking a significant development in constructionist approaches to the generation of meaning, his theory posits that it is through the discursive generation of knowledge that sustains certain ‘regimes of truth’ and rules out others that power is made operative (Foucault, 1977a, 1978a, 1980, 1983). Discourse, then, is the point of juncture between knowledge and power. That is, through discourse both knowledge and power are inextricably linked and set in motion; “both directly imply one another” (Foucault, 1977a: 27). “Knowledge linked to power not only assumes the authority of ‘the truth’ but has the power to make itself true” (Hall, 2001: 76; italics in original). In their productivity of particular knowledges and social realities that occlude other possible fields, in their fictioning of ‘truth’ and ‘reality’, and in the positioning and constitution of people as any number of things – as mad, healthy, or homo/heterosexual, for example – wherein we are subjected to normalising gazes and judgements, discourses and discursive practices as ideologies have very powerful (and very ‘real’) functions and effects (Foucault, 1977a, 1977e, 1978a). Indeed, for Foucault discourses are about productive and disciplinary power. Power functions in and through discourse and their practice; discourses are where relations of power are exercised and enacted (Fairclough, 1989; cf. Henriques et al, 1984; Walkerdine, 1986; Parker, 1992).

“[T]here is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations.”

(Foucault, 1977a: 27)

By ‘power’ Foucault is not merely referring to sovereign or ruling class power, political structure, government or the ‘master-slave’ interface (though these are certainly aspects) but to any ‘reality’ that is supporting (and supported by) types of knowledge (Foucault, 1980).
“[Power] is never localized here or there, never in anybody’s hands, never appropriated as commodity or piece of wealth. Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organisation.”

(Foucault, cited in Kvale, 1992: 113-14)

In one interview Foucault (1984) stipulates that he uses the word ‘power’ as a short cut to his intended expression of ‘relations (or capillaries) of power’ that are to be found in all social fields, in all institutional apparatus and technologies, in bodies, conducts, gestures, and in all human relations be they, for instance, love relationships, sexual, economic or institutional relationships. Although unevenly distributed, power is everywhere – residing in relationships where “one wishes to direct the behaviour of another” (Foucault, 1984: 11). It exists as the ability to make promises and trust another, in the ability to speak the ‘truth’ and express it ‘honestly’, for example (see chapter seven). In short, “power is not an evil [negative and repressive] but involves strategic games” (ibid.:18). And consistent with Foucault’s theory of governmentality as discussed in chapter one, power depends on “at least a certain form of liberty” (ibid: 12). Indeed relations of power do not exist at the expense of either freedom or pleasure but function to produce and induce them; these are two of the conduits for the kind of power play Foucault is theorising (Foucault, 1977b, 1978a, 1985). It is in the very liberties, pleasures, satisfactions and resistances produced by the truth regime of coupledom, for example, that power is also localised.

In summation, power comes from no one source that monopolises it but circulates and radiates everywhere and in everybody, infusing all aspects of social life (e.g. marriage, love, family, sexuality). This is not to imply, as some critics of Foucault’s notions of power and subjectivity have argued (e.g. Giddens, 1982, 1992; Taylor, 1984; MacNay, 1992), that the theory is overly deterministic and leaves no possibility for spaces or moves of resistance. Rather as Knights and Vurdubakis (1994; cf. Gordon, 1980) have suggested, such criticism rests on the dualistic (classical Marxist) understanding of power and resistance as being mutually independent, an understanding that Foucault’s notion of power aims to dispel along with the idea that resistance to power and domination has to come “from somewhere else to be real” (Foucault, 1980: 142). To see power as being ‘everywhere’ is not see it as “total, coherent and exhaustive” (Knights and Vurdubakis, 1994: 189) or as precluding the formation of resistance in the spaces of power. On the contrary, as illustrated in chapter one with regards to the resistance of twelfth romantic love and its subsequent absorption and
deployment by the authorities of church and state, power and resistance (and the subjects/agents of each) are not mutually exclusive. It is, therefore:

“[N]ot a matter of some people having power and others lacking it but the ways in which acts of resistance are also exercises of power and how the same sets of agents can be involved in both exercising power and resisting its effects at one and the same time.”

(Knights and Vurdubakis, 1994: 191-2)

Pertinent to this current analysis of coupledom is a Foucauldian conception of power as not given once and for all but as changeable, modifiable, mobile, multiple, unstable and reversible in that discourses not only produce power but also their own ‘plurality of resistances’ (Foucault, 1973a, 1978a, 1980, 1983). For example, nineteenth century medical discourse on sexuality produced the homosexual as ‘perverse’ but it also produced a subject position from which such pathologisation could be resisted (Foucault, 1978a) as demonstrated by the gay and lesbian community’s adoption of ‘queer’ as a position of resistance. In chapter five I further demonstrate how the romantic discourse of dyadic closure produces a non-monogamous subject position from which traditional romance can be resisted (while also re-confirmed).

What has so far been presented is an outline of Foucault’s post-structuralist approach to representation that centres on the discursive production of knowledge and meaning as organising and regulating social understanding, subjects, conduct, practice and belief. In short, post-structuralism and discourse theory offer a radical account of subjectivity and power relations as not only produced in but also as regulated by discourses and political technologies of selfhood, as well as offering a way of dismantling the ‘regimes of truth’ that constitute social reality. I have highlighted Foucault’s broad conception of language in his theory of discourse that involves the extra-linguistic elements of power-knowledge, discipline, subjectification to discourse, rules of formation, regimes of truth, historical/contextual specificity and conditions of possibility. At this point more is to be said on the ‘extra’ to discourse so as to clarify my theoretical position further.

Those post-structuralist theorists adopting a ‘critical realist’ and ‘extra-discursive’ stance within critical psychology for primarily political purposes (e.g. Hollway, 1995; Wilkinson and
Kitzinger, 1995; Parker, 1992, 1998; Malson, 1998; see also Ussher, 1997a) argue that the rejection of positivist notions of ‘objective’ truth does not necessarily lead to relativism (that any interpretation or knowledge is as good as any other) which for some positivist psychologists (e.g. Fletcher, 2002) renders post-structuralism self-refuting and untenable. Furthermore, critical realist theorists for whom things can be “both inside and outside of texts” (Parker, 1992: 34) assume the existence of a material reality that can exist independently of our descriptions whilst maintaining that “knowledges of the real are always socio-historically contingent” (Malson, 1998: 39). That is to say, while an extra-discursive (or extra-textual) reality can be seen to exist (partially) independent of our knowledge we cannot be certain about the ‘truth’ of that reality since reality is always constructed. However, as Wetherell (1995) argues, to distinguish between the discursive and extra-discursive is problematic in that it, for instance, denies the central role of discourse (as constitutive of ‘reality’) and risks sliding into cause-effect dualism. In that I (like Faireclough, 1993 and Hook, 2001) do not read Foucault as being relativistic or as denying the material effect (or embodiment) of discourse and, like Wetherell, am cautious of distinguishing the extra-discursive, I do not explicitly qualify my Foucauldian position as ‘critical realist’ nor emphasise the ‘outside of texts’ which I regard as already being assumed in a Foucauldian notion of textuality (Foucault, 1977a, 1981a).

In the final section to the theoretical discussion of this chapter, it remains for me to outline the methodological implications of this post-structuralist approach and the tenets of the method of discourse analysis as employed in chapters five to seven. Following this is a detailing of the procedures employed in the two studies of analysis.

3.6 Post-structuralist discourse analysis

The burgeoning field or ‘growth industry’ (Hook, 2001) of the ‘non-definitive method’ (Macleod, 2002) referred to as discourse analysis is made up of an interdisciplinary network of various approaches wherein analysts agree about the function of language and the constructed nature of reality but disagree about the object of study and how to explore it

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4 See Stainton Rogers and Stainton Rogers (1997) for a critique of ‘critical realism’ and a defence of ‘critical relativism’ as not also a position in which ‘everything goes’.
(Parker, 1997a), and vary in the advancement (or not) of a critical politics (Burman and Parker, 1993). It would, therefore, be erroneous to understand discourse analysis as drawing from one epistemological framework, as sharing similar political motivation, or as practised in the same way (Burman and Parker, 1993; Potter, 2003). Nevertheless, for Wetherell et al (2001a: 1; cf. Parker, 1992; Potter, 2003) and many others, “discourse analysis is probably best described as the study of talk and texts. It is a set of methods and theories for investigating language in use and language in social contexts.” In essence, then, the heterogeneous method(s) of discourse analysis uses discourse as data in the exploration of language as a social activity that involves constructive and constituting action-orientation. In a general sense the method aims to “identify patterns of language and related practices and to show how these constitute aspects of society and the people within it” (Wetherell et al, 2001a: 9). If a discourse is about objects, then “discourse analysis is about discourses as objects” (Parker, 1990a: 196). Within critical psychology, discourse analysis has been promoted, for example, by Henriques et al (1984), Walkerdine (1986), Potter and Wetherell (1987), Hollway (1989), Parker (1992), Burman and Parker (1993), and these remain, more or less, the methodological texts drawn on most commonly within critical psychology.

5 The debate over the ‘object’ of study (‘discourse’ or ‘interpretive repertoire’?) as occurring in the exchange between Parker (1990a, 1990b) and Potter et al (1990) still has resonance in terms of how ‘discourse’ is understood and treated in analysis. Briefly paraphrased, Parker’s more Foucauldian position identifies discourse as a ‘system of statements which construct an object’ and promotes a macro analysis that addresses issues of power and ideology, seeing an interest in grammar as too limiting (though useful). From a more ethnomethodological position, Potter et al (1990) oppose this ‘objectifying’ definition of discourse whereby they become coherent and systematised wholes or causal agents, preferring instead the term ‘interpretative repertoire’ which they argue allows for a micro analysis of the effects and function of language (e.g. linguistic and rhetorical devices) in the construction and variation of sets of statements as they produce particular accounts. While for Parker sets of statements are regulated by wider socio-historic resources and contexts, Potter et al see regulation as occurring at the level of formalised spoken (rhetorical) interactions – though both views have currency. As discussed, the ‘macro’ analytic approach of this research is aligned with the Foucauldian stance of Parker for whom discourse and power (as Foucault theorises it) should be talked about ‘in the same breath’ (Parker, 1990a: 199).

6 Other than an explicit post-structuralist orientation, the range of alternative analytic approaches concerned either with rhetoric or discourse and that are all classified as ‘discourse analysis’ have developed from linguistics (Brown and Yule, 1983), the sociology of science (Gilbert and Mulkay, 1984), sociolinguistics and speech act theory (Sinclair and Coulthard, 1975), and cognitive psychology (van Dijk and Kintch, 1983, wherein discourse analysis is used to reveal underlying cognitive functions). The degree to which conversation analysis can be considered ‘discursive’ in approach varies. Yet from an epistemological point of view this type of analysis, like the sociology of science, is more compatible with the post-structuralist stance adopted here. For general discussions of the various approaches to discourse analysis see Potter et al (1990), Willig (1999), Wetherell et al (2001a) and Potter (2003). For examples of approaches see Burman and Parker (1993) and Wetherell et al (2001b).
Following the ‘turn to language’, which now “saturates the whole gamut of the human sciences” (Mather, 2000: 86), the underlying assumption of the broadly conceived discourse analytic approach is that experiences, people and psychosocial ‘realities’ are actively produced in and by language and that meaning is generated in interactional contexts. People construct particular ‘versions of reality’ (Potter and Wetherell, 1987) using socially available discursive resources and repertoires in specific ways and for specific reasons. An important aspect of this (or any) qualitative method in its rejection of empiricist objectivity is the reflexive notion that the researcher, as interpreter and co-conspirator in the construction of social reality, is not separate to the research process and the moral, political choices involved (Lather, 1992). Thus discourse analysis acknowledges that research is always and already political in both nature and intent; that it is not just a methodological technique or intellectual pursuit but also a matter of politics (e.g. Burman, 1997; Wilkinson, 1997; Hood et al, 1999).

While most discourse analytic approaches commonly take discourses (or ‘interpretive repertoires’) as having a constructive function in forming the objects, knowledge, experience and actions of which they speak, a post-structuralist approach, drawing on Foucault in particular, can be characterised by a concern with historical specificity, with the ideological and regulatory effects of discourse, and with the operation of the power-knowledge complex. Discourses, then, are not taken as operating independently to their social, cultural or historical conditions of emergence or from the institutions and the ‘micro-physics of power’ (Foucault, 1977a) that they produce and by which they are sustained (Parker, 1997a). As such, this type of macro/global analysis accounts for ways in which the discursive construction of truths, realities and subjectivities exist and develop as a function of power-knowledge and the truth regimes generated therein. It accounts for how discourses regulate our lives. As stated above, in my analytic orientation less attention is paid to the linguistic/rhetorical devices that are employed in the production of particular and competing accounts of reality (as in the more ‘micro’ approach of Potter and Wetherell, 1987, Billig, 1991; Widdicombe, 1993, for example, that in their focus on the argumentative aspects of talk, nevertheless begin to elucidate the power relations involved and thus share some of the theoretical and methodological concerns of post-structuralism).
This emphasis on power-knowledge is consistent with Foucault (1972) who describes the analysis of discourse (as he understands it from an archaeological/genealogical perspective) as showing the different statements with which one is dealing, how they refer to each other, how they are organised into a single figure, how they converge with institutions and practices and carry meaning that may be common to a whole period. Foucault suggests that we characterise the statements that shape discourses, “the system that governs their division, the degree to which they depend on each other, the way in which they interlock or exclude one another, the transformation that they undergo, and the play of their location, arrangement, and replacement.” (Foucault, 1972: 34). Post-structuralist discourse analysis, then, can be characterised as a form of analysis that involves the study of power, resistance, contestation and struggle (Wetherell et al, 2001a).

### 3.7 Two studies and procedures

As stated, this research involves two studies. The first (chapter four) is an etymological analysis of selected keywords and concepts that are operationalised in, and used to construct, the present practice of coupledom. It constitutes a semantic history of the present practice and is an account of the etymological (semantic) conditions against which the words and systematic statements of this discursive field have come to count as ‘true’. The second and the principle study (chapters five to seven) involves a post-structuralist discourse analysis of interviews conducted with participants about coupledom and is an account of the sets of statements, in relation to selected themes, that make up the discursive domain of coupledom as spoken and enacted in the present.

The purpose of the first study is to disrupt the cultural and hegemonic understanding of the couple relationship and its components by highlighting the socio-historical specificity and historical transformations of some of the key words, concepts, and values commonly deployed to talk about, construct, and govern the couple domain. On this basis, critical ground is laid for the analysis of the present discursive field wherein can be discerned the constitutive effects of its semantic heritage. Thus the etymological exploration works to foreground and underwrite the discourse analysis that proceeds it by highlighting its historical dimensions in terms of some of the primary semantic conditions that enable the vocabulary of coupledom as currently culturally understood. In sum, study one outlines the
semantic conditions of emergence for dyadic partnership and the keywords that make it possible, and *study two* is an analysis of ways in which these words and concepts are deployed and spoken in the present and lived as truth.

3.7.1 *Study 1: Etymological Analysis*

Etymological investigation of the kind I propose is not without precedent in critical psychosocial theory and in historical accounts of emotion. For example, Gillis (1988) draws on etymological analysis to highlight the historical relativity of the everyday notion of ‘emotion’ as the outward expression of private and personal feelings (cf. Harré, 1986; Edwards, 2001). Gillis uses this analytic strategy to show the shift of ‘emotion’ as a concept which, from the mid eighteenth century and early nineteenth centuries, moved from denoting physical movement and social and public action to representing the inner and subjective psychic realm. As Edwards (2001: 238-9) argues:

“In historical studies of the changing meanings of emotion terms in English are important in establishing the cultural relativity and specificity not only of current sets of emotion terms, but also of the general ‘emotionology’ that is built into psychology’s most modern, technical ‘models’.”

In highlighting the historical specificity of the emotion of ‘love’, for example, such work deconstructs the concept as a natural, timeless and universal instinct. “Each act of utterance”, writes Billig (2001: 217), “although itself novel, carries an ideological history.” It is the ideological history of some of the utterances and meanings infusing the couple domain that I will go on to stage in the semantic history of chapter four with the aim of spotlighting them as non-self-evident or natural in their historical contingency. In this study coupledom and the words that shape it are “made to appear as events on the stage of historical process” (Foucault, 1971: 86).

In his etymological enquiry into the vocabulary and keywords underpinning the practices and institutions of Western culture and society, Williams (1976) similarly demonstrates ways in which keywords – words that are indicative of certain systems of thought – have been formed, altered, modified, and reinforced according to changing socio-historical contexts and ways of thinking before taking on their current meanings and significance. Indeed “the
history of a word is at the same time the history of the thing denoted or the idea expressed by that word” (Klein, 1971: x). Like the approaches taken in Nietzschean and Foucauldian genealogies (see Foucault, 1971) and the etymological analysis of this research, Williams is not aiming to discover the ‘real’ meaning of words (dictionaries are not free from active socio-political values), but is interested in the “vitality of a language [that] includes every kind of extension, variation and transfer” (Williams, 1976: 19) that reflect precise historical and social conditions.

“When we go beyond defining dictionaries to historical dictionaries…we are quite beyond the range of ‘proper meaning’. We find a history and complexity of meanings; conscious changes or consciously different uses; innovation, obsolescence, specialization, extension, overlap, transfer; or changes which are masked by a nominal continuity so that words which seem to have been there for centuries, with continuous general meanings, have come in fact to express radically different or radically variable, yet sometimes hardly noticed, meanings and implications of meanings.”

(Williams, 1976: 15)

In such an analysis, words are not taken as authoritative or as standing on their own but are necessarily returned to their general and relational uses and to the field of language and related systems of thought of which they are a part (ibid.: 20). In this, Williams expresses the flavour and intent of the etymological analysis that is presented in the following chapter. And I draw on the example of Williams as a guide for my own analysis.

Procedure

In my etymological mapping of key words and concepts embedded in the discursive field of coupledom my point of departure was taking what appeared to be the significant vocabulary of coupledom as reflected in the interviews I conducted and transcribed and with which I was familiar, beginning with words such as ‘close’, ‘bond’, ‘union’, ‘faithful’, ‘honesty’, ‘duty’, and ‘stability’, for example. Primarily I was concerned with tracing the semantics, nuances, connections and usage of words as recorded over time so as to ascertain some of the conceptual principles, themes, and semantic trends that govern what can be said, meant, and enacted in the present discursive domain of coupledom and by what kind of subject.
Consulting various etymological texts I began by exploring and then cross-referencing general meanings, connections of meanings, and etymological relationships with the aim of discerning a wider field of historically situated meaning in which could be discerned general grids of intelligibility, subjectivity, and historic systems of thought.\(^7\) This involved beginning with recorded (historical) meanings of a large cluster of words and arranging these into themes in terms of shared derivations and nuances, patterns of influence, and semantic emphases/connections. Looking at recorded meanings of the word ‘intimacy’ over time, for example, sense lending words such as ‘individual’, ‘announcement’ and ‘inner’ were followed up as having bearing on the present usage of ‘intimacy’ in the couple domain. The etymologies of these sense lending words were then traced, thematic connections were made with other words denoting ‘authenticity’ (such as ‘truth’, ‘honesty’ and ‘faithfulness’), for instance, and semantic/thematic relationships were explored with a view to ascertaining the wider condition of possibility for the current utterance, practice, and sense of ‘intimacy’ as it pertains to the couple relationship.

Having compiled a large body of words that were organised into general meanings, further investigation of traces of meaning, nuances, transformations and overlap together with detailed cross-referencing, led to various themes and patterns being identified such as the themes of ‘closure’, ‘inward looking’, ‘authenticity/truth’, ‘honour’, ‘duty and obligation’, ‘sending forth’ and ‘making certain’. Patterns looked for were those of both continuity and discontinuity as etymological development is by no means continuous and unbroken (Williams, 1976; cf. Foucault, 1971). Noun formations and the transformations of these highlighted the changing linguistic constructions of objects and the etymologies of verbal formations presented a picture of the kind of subject who was, and is, able to think, feel and act when objects/knowledges were made the properties of individual capacity (particularly from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries). Dominant and shifting patterns of meaning, thought and subjective capability were noted and dated where senses of words (or groups of words) moved from, for example, denoting actions to denoting ‘emotions’, or from signifying an external object or physical act to denoting a subjective property.

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As the various patterns and themes were further developed in terms of apparent alteration and overlap, the complex field of intersecting meanings was gradually narrowed over time according to the emergent narratives that I chose as potentially significant and appropriate to my purpose. Thus a complex thematic composite of linguistic unities, variations and fluctuations was refined into a coherent narrative so as to highlight a selected part of the system of meanings and semantic relations that make possible the activity of couples in the present. As Williams (1976) notes, the difficulty in such a selective arrangement of words is that in deciding on particular sets of connections, other sets and the narratives they designate are often suppressed. Indeed the process of refining a large resource of material was a selective one and so the analysis of Study One constitutes a partial tracing of a complex semantic history. And, of course, the history of coupledom can only be partially traced through the etymology of words. For this reason the etymological analysis also refers to various historical and genealogical accounts such as Stone (1977), Gillis (1988), Rose (1989, 1999), Nietzsche (1887a) and Foucault (1977a, 1978a, 1985, 1986) in order to both substantiate and make further claims.

Study One thus lays out something of the historical development of the discursive field in which coupledom is currently constituted and regulated. It therefore provides the historical, cultural and semantic background to the discursive analyses of Study Two.

3.7.2 Study 2: Discourse Analysis

Participants and categories

The data for the analysis of Study Two consisted of interviews conducted in both Sydney and Melbourne with 28 participants. The sample included 10 couples, one relationship involving 3 people, and 7 individuals (6 of whom were in a relationship at the time and one not). Ages ranged from 24 to 55 years. Relationship duration ranged from 2 months to 29 years. While not a condition of recruitment, the sample was largely homogenous in terms of social class and educational background with the vast majority being white, middle class Australians. Other ethnic backgrounds included one participant of Spanish origin, one of American origin, and two of British origin. (See Appendix A for a Table of Participants and further details).
A cross-section of participants was targeted from the four categories of: heterosexual and sexually monogamous (N=9); heterosexual and sexually non-monogamous (N=5); same sex and sexually monogamous (N=5); same sex and sexually non-monogamous (N=8). The sample was recruited through word of mouth as well as via notices posted at gymnasiums in Sydney. The recruitment notice and the information sheet that was given to participants before signing the consent form invited people from the four categories, and those identifying as ‘bisexual’ (N=1, also sexually non-monogamous), to separately, informally and confidentially talk about their ‘thoughts, opinions, and experiences’ of sexual monogamy and non-monogamy in particular and of couple relationships more generally in a non-judgmental, non-counselling context.8 Other than a stated preference for interviews with both/all parties and for a non-monogamous practice that was consensual, no criteria for inclusion was stipulated. In the notices distributed, a monogamous relationship was defined as ‘one in which the sexual activity of both partners is exclusive to the relationship’. A non-monogamous relationship was defined as ‘one in which the sexual activity of one or both partners is not exclusive to the relationship and is practised in full knowledge of both partners’.

As mentioned, participants were asked to self-identify their relationships according to the four categories being targeted prior to interview. During the course of the interviews, however, such categorisation proved to be problematic in that three couples who identified their relationships as ‘monogamous’ prior to being interviewed talked about their relationship as involving consensual sexual non-monogamy during the interview, understanding their monogamy as emotional exclusivity. And others who initially identified their relationship as ‘non-monogamous’ talked about their relationship during the interview.

8 See Appendices B to D (pages 311–314) for copies of the information statement, consent form and recruitment notice respectively. Note that the working title and description of the research in this information refers to the ‘social constructions of monogamy and non-monogamy’. Sexual monogamy and non-monogamy as constructed and practiced in heterosexual, homosexual and bisexual couple relationships, and a comparison of these constructions and practices, was at the time of recruitment and in the early stages of interviewing the proposed focus of my research. In this my intention was to critique sexual monogamy as a relational practice by giving voice to non-monogamous relationships as a more ‘liberal’ couple arrangement and as offering an effective challenge to the hegemony of couple-monogamy. However, a shift in focus occurred soon after I began to conduct and transcribe interviews. This was because the simplistic division I had assumed to exist between ‘monogamy’ and ‘non-monogamy’ soon emerged as problematic as the re-productions of a monogamous paradigm in non-monogamous relationships became increasingly apparent to me. As a result I became interested in what I thought to be a more fruitful focus on the across context discursive productions and regulations of coupledom more generally that could account for, but was not limited to, the discursive productions of monogamy and non-monogamy as mutually exclusive ideological practices.
as being ‘monogamous’ also in terms of emotional exclusivity, sometimes even when secondary relationships were consensually engaged in. Similarly, some participants identifying as ‘heterosexual’ prior to the interview identified as bisexual during the interview in that they had experimented with or were experimenting with bisexuality to facilitate the non-monogamy of their relationship or were intending to do so (N=5). Thus the various categorisations initially set up in this research began to unravel during the research process and therefore should not be taken as accurate or rigid representations of participants and practices. Categorising relationships according to ‘type’ was no simple matter and the categories proved to be crudely presumptuous. Within this multiplicity of meaning and practice, rigid and normalising terminology was not reflective of divergent understanding and practice or the slipperiness of categories.

Couples/individuals varied in terms of living together (N=12) or not (N=4) as did the relationship histories and the accounts given of relationships. Other than the ‘standard’ arrangement of two people publicly declaring themselves as being in a ‘relationship’ and as always being in proximity to each other, one relationship involved three gay men, another was conducted long-distance (on and off) for a number of years, and the relationship of one participant was a clandestine arrangement with a partner who was married to, and living with, someone else. ‘Non-monogamous’ couples/individuals varied in terms of (sometimes) engaging in ‘secondary’ relationships (N=5, includes 1 polyamorist participant for whom the notion of ‘secondary’ relationships is not appropriate) or not (N=3), and whether sexual activity involving a third person could be practised separately (N=5) or only with both/all partners being present (N=3). There was also variation in the length of time non-monogamy had been practised in ‘non-monogamous’ relationships, ranging from nine months to fourteen years. The sample includes couples who have moved from sexual monogamy to sexual/emotional non-monogamy but does not include a couple or individual who had experienced a shift in practice from non-monogamy to monogamy. Two heterosexual couples, both married and co-habiting, had children. With the exception of the clandestine arrangement mentioned above, participants reported feeling generally positive about their relationships.
Procedure

Of the 28 interviews, 17 were carried out in the participant’s home or the home of their partner. 9 interviews were conducted in the interviewer’s home when participant’s preferred. 2 interviews were conducted in public settings (a café and a park). All participants were interviewed individually generally over one hour. The interviews were loosely semi-structured in that a list of preconceived topic areas was usually, but not always, covered. Guiding topic areas did not involve a list of questions that were asked sequentially and the interviews were conducted flexibly with interviewees able to initiate and direct topics of significance or concern. Participants were asked about the background of their relationship and how they understood the notions of non/monogamy, love, intimacy, commitment, trust, and loyalty. Discussion usually centred around: a participant’s experience with partnerships; thoughts about what a ‘relationship’ is; the positive and negative aspects of participant’s relationships; their views on and experiences of monogamous and non-monogamous practices and the benefits and challenges involved; the workings of ‘secondary’ and non-dyadic relationships; what participants thought may be the benefits and disadvantages of relationships that are practiced differently from their own (sexually and emotionally); what the definition of a ‘successful’ partnership was to them; ways in which their current relationship is different to previous ones; their hopes for it, and how it may have changed over time. Interviews were audio-taped and transcribed verbatim. Names and identifying details have been changed to retain participants’ anonymity.

Working with the corpus of interview material involved a number of readings and re-readings over a period of several months. Both initial readings and the detailed analysis of extracts that followed were guided by the research questions and involved constant critical examination of my own presuppositions and subjective orientation that inevitably impacted on my readings. This is not to imply, however, that my subjective reading of the material could somehow be bypassed and an ‘objective’ apprehension of the material achieved but it is necessary in discourse analysis to call into question one’s “unexamined techniques of sense making” (Potter and Wetherell, 1987: 168), one’s inevitable habitation of the discourses being deconstructed (Derrida, 1976) and to recognise that “the knower is part of the matrix of what is known” (Wilkinson, 1986: 12; Parker, 1992) so that one’s reading is potentially more fruitful rather than ‘accurate’.
The analytic process began with a focus on the regularities and variations of the meaning of words and concepts that participants were asked to define during interview. These could be easily compared so as to ascertain a preliminary picture of both ‘typical’ and ‘non-typical’ constructions and themes that served as the initial basis for the coding of transcripts. This initial interpretive/thematic organisation was guided by Potter and Wetherell’s (1987) specification of construction (the utilisation of pre-existing cultural meanings) and variation (multiplicity and contradiction) as two of the major components of discourse analysis. Variations and contradictions in and across the discursive construction of concepts and subjects were necessarily looked for in that they bring into view the operation and impact of other discourses (Parker, 1992). Potter and Wetherell’s (1987) third component of function (what the constructions are achieving) was also a significant feature of this analysis. But rather than focusing on the linguistic specificities of variation and function, the more global aspects of these were attended to in order to highlight ways in which the emergent discourses, constructions, patterns and variations worked to produce particular versions of knowledge and relations of power (Walkerdine, 1986; Parker, 1992). This search for patterns was also guided by two other now familiar critical analytic concepts – ‘interpretive repertoires’ (Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Wetherell and Potter, 1988) and ‘ideological dilemmas’ (Billig et al, 1988) whereby a shared social consensus (of accounts, descriptions and evaluations) is constructed amidst competing versions and inconsistencies.

These analytic tools served in the thematic organisation of the material into various broadly conceived codes. For the preliminary coding, the interview material was photocopied many times and cut into chunks of text which were then sorted into initial codes such as: non/separation of emotion and sex; shifts in belief; the notion of home; ideological tensions; third parties; monogamous view of non-monogamy; non-monogamous view of monogamy; the self in non/monogamy; and constructions of dyadic bondedness, betrayal, security and relational success, for example. This initial coding into broad categories that were relevant to the research aims was a preparation for the subsequent detailed analysis and served the pragmatic function of reducing material through a selective process of coding that at the same time was as inclusive as possible in the initial stages (Potter and Wetherell, 1987). As coding developed through continued close reading of texts, quotes were removed as well as added in the refinement of each category. The coding schedule continued to change over time during the process of analysis and as the kinds of themes, issues and discursive
repertoires that could potentially serve the research aims and tell a coherent ‘story’ were increasingly decided on and refined.

Guided by Foucault’s (1972) archaeology of discursive formation and Parker’s (1992) seven criteria for analysis, the process of refinement and of the more intensive scrutiny of texts in a post-coding analysis shifted from the identification of construction and variation to a concern for the productive and regulatory power of discursive practice and the historical specificity of the knowledge complexes apparent in the material. Here an increased attention was paid to the wider systems of coherent meaning discernible in the material as well as to objectification, subjectivity and the processes of subjectification. At this stage of the analysis the strategic deployments and operations of recurrent values such as ‘personal freedom’, ‘discipline’, ‘security’, ‘authenticity’ and ‘containment’ were attended to in terms of how they specified, enabled and delimited practice. In continuing the process of analysis by (a) refining categories such that they sufficiently reflected those power-knowledges and practices that were being decided on and (b) continuing with a detailed analysis of the extracts in each of the categories, a coherent thematic (and interpretive) narrative took shape. Decisions about what extracts to discard, include and analyse in detail, about which of the emergent themes were to be included in which category as they were settled on were constantly being made in these latter stages of analysis, highlighting the fact that discourse analysis is ultimately a process of effective data management that is more or less guided by the analytic tools at a researcher’s disposal, and that it is a subjective, intuitive craft of interpretive decipherment and reconstruction (Potter, 2003).

3.8 Conclusion

As suggested above, what can be discerned in post-structuralism, Foucauldian discourse theory and discourse analysis “is an unrelenting scepticism towards all those rationales, explanations and statements that would validate themselves on the grounds of their proximity to a supposed truthfulness” (Hook, 2001: 524). This theoretical and methodological orientation represents “a process of retheorising the objects and experiences of everyday life in the twilight of modernity, an epochal turning point in how the world and the possibilities of human agency are conceived” (Lather, 1992: 104). It challenges and deconstructs the scientifically authorised generation of ‘legitimate’ knowledge and provides
the conceptual and analytic tools for a reconfiguration of social practices that are constructed and affirmed in the various postulations of the human sciences. Significantly, the approach interprets mainstream social psychology as no more than a culturally contingent process of story-telling (Stainton Rogers et al., 1995). While a discursive perspective and method of analysis likewise do no more than tell (different) stories, the truth claims, know-hows, power and politics of those stories and their relations to technologies of regulation are (hopefully) different inasmuch as they can generate knowledges that are unhinged from Truth. As such, a post-structuralist epistemology and associated discourse theory, together with the qualitative mode of analysis derived from them, can be seen as a useful theoretical framework and analytic approach for a critical re-appraisal of the discursive domain of coupledom. The epistemological and methodological approach outlined in this chapter are particularly suited not only to an exploration of how the regime of coupledom is variously constructed, it also facilitates a more thorough analysis of the systems of thought by which the regime is produced as a productive and disciplinary field of power-knowledge.

From this perspective, the couple relationship can thus be understood not so much as the inevitable effect of ‘natural’ desires but as a socio-historically specific form of existence and social arrangement that constitutes and regulates experience and subjectivities. Thus post-structuralism and the theoretic concepts of discourse, discursive practice, subjectivity and power have acute implications for a radical understanding and treatment of the practice in question by providing the grounds for a subversive take on its constitution, its presupposed truths, its productive power relations, and its popularised values, liberations and resistances. Significant to my application of the theoretical perspective described above is the analysis of coupled-subjects as being not only the effect of discursively produced multiplicities, but as also constituent of a set of productive, historically located, and politically contingent technologies of selfhood whereby the subject takes on a particular ‘responsibilised’ relation to itself as an ethical necessity. Accounting for the discursive notion of subject positions (Davies and Harré, 1990) while emphasising Foucault’s related theories of ‘technologies of the self’ and ‘governmentality’ (chapter one) allows for a more thorough study of what emergent subject positions are doing (and confirming) from an ontological and disciplinary point of view. Furthermore, analyses of the kinds carried out in the two studies of this thesis allow for the historicising of subjects and objects in socio-historically specific systems of thought and delimited possibility. Using the theoretical orientation and analytic tools here
outlined, the ensuing analyses aim to both pluralise and also *historièse* subjects and objects and the discourses that speak them into being.

While post-structuralism can indeed move dangerously close to being a totalising and monolithic theory – an explain-all, grand narrative of its own (Stainton Rogers *et al*, 1995) - drawing on this perspective and on Foucauldian theory does, I think, provide critical and creative avenues for researching the social and psychological phenomenon of coupledom in such a way that its socio-cultural specificity is more fully addressed and its moral-ethical-emotional ‘components’ and ‘processes’ reconceptualised as discursively founded and politically fashioned in a liberal question of governance. By refusing the notion of absolute ‘truth’ and by substituting this with the productivity of language, it is possible to thoroughly critique and destabilise the scientific authorisations of how, why, and in what form we live our intimate lives.

“[I]nstead of providing a basis for what already exists, instead of going over with bold strokes lines that have already been sketched, instead of finding reassurance in this return and final confirmation, instead of completing the blessed circle that announces, after innumerable stratagems…, that all is saved, one is forced to advance beyond familiar territory, far from the certainties to which one is accustomed, towards an as yet unchartered land and unforeseeable conclusion.”

(Foucault, 1972: 38-9)

In the etymological and discursive analyses that follow I move beyond the already sketched customs, familiarities and certainties of the couple domain as drawn up and authorised by the psy-disciplines and de-confirm them as being embedded in a socio-historically contingent and discursively (re)produced domain of power-knowledge. This de-confirmation begins with an etymological analysis or semantic history of the present discursive field of coupledom and the always relative systems of thought that are reflected in its vocabulary and selected keywords.
CHAPTER FOUR

Etymological Analysis

Semantic surfaces and sculptings

“If the genealogist refuses to extend his faith in metaphysics, if he listens to history, he finds that there is ‘something altogether different’ behind things: not a timeless and essential secret, but the secret that they have no essence or that their essence was fabricated in a piecemeal fashion from alien forms.”

Michel Foucault (1971: 78)

“Our language can be seen as an ancient city: a maze of little streets and squares, of old and new houses, and of houses with additions from various periods; and this surrounded by a multitude of new boroughs with straight regular streets and uniform houses.”

Ludwig Wittgenstein (1958: 8)

4.1 Introduction

This chapter is an etymological analysis of some of the culturally dominant words, significations, and traces of meaning that have over time established, altered and reinforced the semantic architecture of the couple domain and its ostensible reality. It is an exploration into aspects of the complex language system wherein the objects and subjects of coupledom are constituted and knowledged-into-being in specific ways. And it targets certain power relations that are operationalised in and by this knowledge. As an enquiry into the conditional (and conditioning) vocabulary and shared body of words that have shaped the knowledge-power of the couple matrix, this analysis situates various meanings, practices, and values of coupledom in their historic-linguistic contexts. So in this etymological survey or semantic history, I aim to sketch some of the semantic conditions of emergence of contemporary partnership and on this basis characterise something of the underlying systems of thought that underscore the practice and make possible its commonly deployed enunciations. Its purpose is to cast light on some of the linguistic surfaces of emergence within which coupledom and its processes have emerged and against which this domain’s
knowledge can be unpacked and brought into view not as a naturally evolving and final product but as a collectivity of shifting socio-historic linguistic formations.

In this I am not concerned with the ‘real’ meanings of words but look for various transformations, extensions, and semantic overlays across a cluster of inter-related words and traces of meaning that have over time mobilised the (everyday and theoretical) discursive field of coupledom. I am not searching for origins or on a quest for the essence of things (as is the tradition of etymology) but attend to various semantic skirmishes and eruptions in lifting the lid on the sculptural activity of words. At the same time, given the constitutive nature of discourse, this etymological analysis is a history of the things and ideas conjured by the words in question and aims to “disturb what was previously considered immobile, fragment what was thought unified, and show the heterogeneity of what was imagined consistent with itself” (Foucault, 1971: 82).

Specifically what I trace is the productive activity of words and their activation of various discursive technologies that have over time ‘connected’ people together as couples in specific ways; that have delineated and arranged particular spaces and visibilities, channelled formative affective conduits, containments, constancies and satisfactions, sculptured the psychologies of the ‘sensitive’ individual and ‘emotional’ partnership, and induced particular relations to (and regimes of) truth, be it that of selves or of pairings. I trace (dis)continuous patterns of meaning, action and thought, highlighting ways in which these have organised, disciplined and fixed dyadic experience/subjectivity and practice from the fourteenth to the nineteenth century when the current organisation of coupledom can be seen to have been largely consolidated (Foucault, 1978a). Foucauldian theorisations of power, discipline, and subjectivity as discussed in the previous chapter, as well as his genealogy of the ethical mastery of pleasures are drawn on in this analysis of the regulatory (stabilising) economies of togetherness, constancy, containment, self-truth and satisfaction as they are variously reflected in, and enabled by, the historic vocabulary of coupledom.

My discussion picks up from the point made in chapter one concerning the thirteenth century deployment of the connective concept of marital ‘union’ by church and state as a means of tempering and containing the secular and ‘spontaneous’ romantic passions that were seen to threaten the existing feudal moral, economic and theological order (De
Rougemont, 1983, 2003; Stone, 1977). In this feudal battle of competing interests and values, church and state authority took control of, while redefining, an ‘unearthed’ capacity to ‘love’ by configuring love as the basis for marriage and thereby reinforcing the sanctified and economically useful conjugal arrangement (Baker and Elliston, 1975). From partners being joined together in marriage by way of a contractual ‘union’ and a dutiful submission to the moral, economic and reproductive duty that this particular technology of pairing compelled, the family (previously a more open structure based on kinship) took on its nuclear structure and function and sexual (romantic) passion was confined to the marital bed (Baker and Elliston, 1975; Stone, 1977). From the thirteenth century, then, contracted marriage and the nuclear family this gave rise to in the late sixteenth century became the primary organising principles of society (Shorter, 1975; Stone, 1977) and the various connective technologies by which married couples (and families) were brought together served to produce ‘the couple’ along the conceptual lines of metaphorical ropes, ties, and emotional containments.

4.2 Actions that bind

Circa 1280\(^1\) the noun *couple* was first recorded in English and appears as one of the early words denoting the human condition of being linked together and interconnected, although only early in the next century was its meaning specified as denoting any *two* things. The word is etymologically listed as deriving from the Latin *copula* meaning ‘link, band and tie’ (*co* ‘together’ + *apere* ‘to join’). \(^2\) Thus the idea of being ‘coupled’ in its early sense referred to the link rather than the (two) people and implied being connected in a particular fashion. Being ‘coupled’ (and later ‘paired’) was a matter of being ‘joined’ by way of a fastening and tying together and the metaphoric couple-connection continued to be variously denoted along these lines with the ‘sexual connection’ of opposite sexes being recorded from 1362 when (reproductive) sexual relations came to be configured as a means of paired connection and

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\(^1\) As Williams (1976) notes, the *Oxford English Dictionary* takes written language as its source of authority and the spoken language as being derived from it. In his etymological study of keywords in culture and society, Williams cautions that period indications for origins and changes of meanings are to be taken reservedly as meanings can occur in spoken language long before entering written records. Similarly I advise that datings in this chapter derive from written records and as such do not indicate when concepts were being constructed in and by spoken English.

\(^2\) Unless otherwise stated all quotations are from the full version of the *Oxford English Dictionary* (Second Edition) either in hardback form (1989) or CD-Rom (1992).
of being ‘joined’ (Baker and Elliston, 1975). The word *married*, with early meanings also to do with a husband and wife being ‘joined’ (often in contexts where they acted jointly as domestic servants), was also first recorded in 1362. As I go on to outline, the idea of being ‘tied’, ‘bound’ and ‘joined’ together took on specific connotations during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries in relation to being *wed* and *married* where being fastened and joined together appeared to be predicated on a physical connection – one that concerned (reproductive) sex, a physical expression of love (rather than feelings) and the notion of a symbiotic ‘oneness’. Thus the ties that joined and bound a married couple were physical activities (Cancian, 1987; Gillis, 1988) and were also material in that the conjugal ‘tie’ from the fourteenth century (as it had previously; Stone, 1977) signified and warranted a range of not only reproductive but also economic duties that were also to be made certain by the act of being physically ‘joined’ in marriage.

From the mid fourteenth century the verb *to marry* is recorded as the taking of a husband or wife and being united in matrimony. Thus the predominant point of entry into the conjugal domain was at this time, if not earlier, understood and practised as the specific connection of ‘unification’ which derives from the Latin *unire* (to unite) and *unus* (meaning ‘one’). Here the act of a conjugal ‘joining’ was imbued with the specific sense of combining as ‘one’. In this the (thirteenth century) Christian and romanticised ideal of married *union* makes available, and obliges, a specific way of being joined or tied together in terms of a symbiotic connection. Hence at this time semantic conditions were being laid for dyadic connections that continue to be variously understood as closing perceived gaps and spaces between people as with the signifier ‘close’, for example (see section 4.4). Also of note is the concurrent introduction of the English word ‘matrimony’ from the Latin *matrimonium* meaning ‘wedlock and marriage’, with *matrem* meaning ‘mother’ and *monium* denoting ‘action’. Here the particular duty of reproduction in thirteenth century marriage is emphasised, a duty that the connection of married ‘union’ also served to ensure as a reconfiguration of, and a counter, to (twelfth century) romantic passion where sexual relations were not necessarily reproductive (De Rougemont, 2003). Also with ‘matrimony’ and its etymological link to *matrix*, conditions of possibility seemed to have been established for the twentieth century psychoanalytic conception of romantic ‘attachment’ as mimicking the action, state and condition of motherhood wherein she (and her relationship to the child) is ascribed iconic
status and influence over our adult relational capabilities and performances (see chapter two).

The point to be emphasised about the ‘ties, bands and links’ of thirteenth century marriage and coupling is that these connective metaphors reflect couples being joined and united by way of physical actions and conditions. Consistent with this is that ‘love’ and ‘emotions’ at the time were not understood as non-material, psychologised feelings as in current usage but were instead physical properties that were transmitted via physical activities. Predominately ‘love’ was made visible and ritualised through bodily movement, economic co-operation and material support (Cancian, 1987). According to Cancian (1987) and Gillis (1988; cf. MacFarlane, 1987), the common argument that love was rare before the eighteenth century (e.g. Shorter, 1975; Stone, 1977) is an historical distortion given that love was not always identified with pure feeling and psychological intimacy but can be seen to have existed as public action, as bodily movement, as not transmitted through feelings and emotions but through bodily orifices and identified with bodily fluids such as blood (Gillis, 1988). Prior to the psyche/soma split of the nineteenth century, argues Gillis, “the body was not simply expressing emotion; it was emotion itself” (ibid.: 92).

With the emergence of the psychologised individual and the radical separation of the psyche and soma from the late eighteenth century and during the nineteenth century in particular (Cancian, 1987; Gillis, 1988; Stearns and Stearns, 1988), the acts and physical expressions/substances that once united partners became the feelings that connected them. Etymological analysis of transformations to do with what it meant to be ‘joined’ or ‘tied’ from the thirteenth century to the nineteenth supports the argument that being joined and bound together in conjugal and couple relationships moved from being practised solely as physical activity and economic co-operation to being explicitly understood and played out as emotion and feeling. This is evident in the semantic deployments of the words bond and close as two of the current primary representations of the married/couple connection. From the late sixteenth century, the increasing assimilation of the connective concept of ‘bond’ and the spatialising construct of ‘close’ into the discursive field of coupldom gives emphasis to a requirement to both feel and privately contain the emotionality of being ‘joined’.
4.3 Feelings that bind

In the thirteenth century sense of the word ‘bond’ as a ‘binding, fastening together and making tight as with a rope or band’ the idea of people (and objects) being tied and linked together recurs and connotations of a restraint of liberty and holding prisoner were clearly assumed. At the same time the word ‘attach’ (from the French *attachier*, meaning ‘to nail’) similarly implied a fastening and tying together with an emphasis on legal seizure and arrest. As such, overtones of power and influence in terms of bonded labour, seizure, constraint, strength and weakness provide a particular semantic background to the ensuing psychologisation and emotionalisation of the couple-connection by way of a metaphorical ‘binding’ and a perceived need to be ‘bonded’ and ‘attached’. That is, understandings of the connection between couples can be seen as moving from physical ties and expression and material constraint to the connection of psychologised feelings that in producing a form of ‘bondedness’, ‘attachment’ and ‘closeness’ involve the power of emotional constraint. As these concepts were from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries adopted as signifiers for the couple connection, submission to reproductive, economic and domestic duty expanded to include the powers and restraints of psychological and emotional obligation. And insofar as the Old English *bonda* was aligned with the ‘master of the house or husband’, the concept and practice of being ‘bonded’ in marriage involved an overt patriarchal hierarchy wherein the recognition and performance of physical and emotional connection was a gendered operation (Foucault, 1985).

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (1989), the ‘*bonds* of wedlock or matrimony’ (recorded from the 1600s) carried the sense of ‘a constraining force or tie that *acts upon the mind* and that is recognised as obligation or duty’. Thus in being ‘bound’ and ‘bonded’ together in mind, from the seventeenth century the coupled dyad came to be ‘tied’ in a psychological way. With ‘bond’ as a further signifier of unionised partnership, the already established metaphoric connection of being ‘tied’ together takes on the specific characteristic of a constraining metaphysical *force* that is not physical in nature but begins to operate in and on mentality. Significantly, the connotation and action of constraint does not subside with this semantic shift; the notion of bondedness as a force of mental constraint continued to constrain action not simply through prescribing duties of behaviour but by constraining actions, *thought* and *affect* through the prescription and psychologisation of emotional duty. In
that the developing senses of bondedness connoted a constraining force of influence that impacted and ‘acted upon the mind’, along with the connective technology of ‘intimacy’ (as discussed below), the concept appears to be one of the first to circumscribe and target an emerging psychology and disembodied mind, at least in relation to coupledom.

So as a force that acted on, influenced and in concurrent nuances ‘enslaved’ the mind primarily through ‘affection and passion’, the assimilation of ‘bond’ into the semantic field of conjugal connectedness reflected a move away from actions and underscores a seventeenth century concern for the emotional dynamics of coupledom. Thus the metaphorical ties and ropes that had previously united people in marriage by way of dutiful action had by the eighteenth century, and particularly in the nineteenth, explicitly become the feelings and emotions that bind (see Cancian, 1987; Stearns and Stearns, 1988). And this of course was associated with the concurrent rise of the ‘individual’ who was at the time being ascribed a ‘sensitive’ capacity (Stone, 1977) and able to experience emotions not so much as a physical force but as ‘strong feelings’ (Gillis, 1988). Thus with the deployment of words such as ‘union’ and ‘bond’ in the discursive practice of coupledom it appears that couples were tied, influenced and therefore regulated in both conduct and thought in a submission to duty and the influence of emotions.

The point so far is that current usage of a set of words such as ‘union’, ‘attachment’, ‘bondedness’ and ‘emotions’ do not reflect a timeless essence or natural quality with regard to the couple connection. The enabling metaphors of ‘joining’, ‘unification’ and ‘bondedness’ do not simply describe the couple experience (married or otherwise) or represent an independent essence that is separate to the words that describe and construct it but are the historically contingent modes and technologies by which relationships are held together and that determine how they are thought of, lived and maintained. The meanings and functions of these words and concepts have changed over time and only gradually have they become psychologised as the conduits of connectedness, affect and couple practice. And in being so psychologised the traces of meaning that specify constraint, force and influence are largely occluded. Yet such constructive and historically shifting metaphors can be seen as involving implicit and overt regulatory functions as they work to ‘tie down’, ‘join together’, stabilise and make secure so as to keep objects and people in their ‘positions or collective forms’ (a current sense of ‘bond’) either by way of actions, economic-moral duty, or feelings.
A further example of the productive and regulatory connective technologies commonly deployed by couples is the notion of close, a technology that does not so much tie together as with a rope or band but which opens and circumscribes a particular metaphoric space for the containment of the emotions and feelings that had been ‘unleashed’ or brought to bear during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In the following section, then, I focus on the specific kind of space that being ‘close’ actively delineates and qualifies and highlight its power as a semantic device for the containment of psychologised emotions. Indeed, as Foucault (1977b) suggests, a history of metaphorical and material spaces would at the same time be the history of power.

4.4 A containing closeness

In current psychological theory on intimate relationships and in the ways participants talk of them, the notion of ‘closeness’, like that of ‘bond’, is frequently drawn on to express the psychology of a couple-connection and its quality. The modern English close derives from the Latin clausum, meaning ‘enclosure’ and claudere, meaning ‘shut’. From this semantic activation of an enclosure that both shuts in and blocks out - again a form of physical constraint - comes the current meaning of closeness as a word that from the eighteenth century depicted ‘spaces or intervals that are closed up’ or a ‘nearness and proximity’ that involves ‘little space in between and a fitting together’, all specifically conveying a reduction and interlocking of spaces in the same way that a unified ‘oneness’ does. While ‘close’ doesn’t explicitly involve the idea of being ‘tied together’ in the same way that the connective concepts of bond, attachment and union do, its etymology similarly implies various senses of confinement such as being ‘shut in, guarded, secretive, restricted and oppressed’. So while the current emphasis of meaning is to do with ‘nearness and proximity’, the etymology of ‘close’ illustrates the constraint of being shut-in as being the very condition for that nearness. As such, meanings of ‘close’ work to consolidate the themes of confinement and restriction not through the metaphors of ropes, bands and ties but by the explicit constructions of a closed-in, guarded, and restricted space and nearness. The traces of meaning in the etymology of ‘close’ again show the largely occluded nuances of constraint and shut in-ness that are imbricated in the seemingly comforting notion of being emotionally close that takes on its positive characteristic as the emphasis of being ‘close’ moves from being a confined enclosure to denoting a comforting nearness. And the discursive practice of relational ‘closeness’, another
example of a physical restraint that from the eighteenth century also becomes psychologised
and emotionalised, can be seen as marking out a metaphorical space that it also prescribes as
an exclusive one in terms of being contained, secret, shut in, and guarded.

While a metaphorical space, the deployment of the signifier ‘close’ and its associated
meanings in the couple domain can nevertheless be said to have very real constitutive and
disciplinary effects. As Rose (1999; cf. Poovey, 1995) argues, the markings out of metaphoric
spaces create actual spaces as they become modelled in thought. He suggests that the carving
up of spaces in terms of populations, nations, schools and societies, for example, like the
marking out of time, makes matter visible and governable, and that “governable
spaces...make new kinds of experience possible, produce new modes of perception, invest
precepts with affects, with dangers, opportunities, with saliences and attractions” (Rose,
1999: 32). For Rose, these fabricated spaces represent intelligible fields that in making matter
visible become govern(ed)able domains with each space requiring and determining a certain
mode of occupancy and conduct. It is this politicised understanding of spaces and the
governable visibilities they elicit that Foucault (1977a) is concerned with in his critique of the
regulatory function of panoptic spaces and visibilities (as discussed in chapter seven).

The disciplined space of the ‘close’ couple can be seen as operating in these terms. Like
every other govern(able)ed space we inhabit, the space of emotional ‘closeness’ that we
occupy as couples confines us to a psychologised way of relating that is specific to and also
governed in that space. Related to this is the twentieth century model of domestic space as a
particular spatial arrangement wherein relations between family members and couples are
increasingly perceived and enacted as exclusive, contained and private (Williams, 1976;
Stone, 1977; De Swan, 1990). During the 1900s the domesticated ‘home’ took on its special
meaning in being privileged as a closed and private space that was screened off from
outsiders and public influence (De Swann, 1990; a point picked up on in chapters five and
seven). In these domestic spaces, ‘close’, ‘intimate’ relations are lived out privately and are
shielded from outside intrusion. At the same time, however, these domesticated spaces were
also subject to the scrutiny of the medical and psychological professions and increasingly
become the target of various governmental interventions concerned with standards of
health, hygiene, and the social adjustment of children (Foucault, 1978a; Donzelot, 1979;
Rose, 1989). As such, domestic spaces serve to make couple (and family) relations visible, as
Rose (1989) suggests, because it is in these spaces that the details of our private lives are observed and recorded. Domesticy and ‘close’ relationships, then, are governable and regulated spaces in that the (gendered) repertoire of behaviours, psychologies, feelings and emotions these spaces generate and privilege are effectively recorded and ‘normalised’ in them. Our domestiles and our intersubjective closeness “act as norms, enabling the previously aleatory and unpredictable complexities of human conduct to be charted and judged in terms of conformity and deviation, to be coded and compared, ranked and measured” (ibid.: 135-6).

Significant to the inter-personal connection of ‘closeness’ (and also of ‘intimacy’, as discussed below) is that this metaphorical space of affect mobilises a particular model for emotional expression. Besides a sense of ‘fitting together’, etymological exploration of the word ‘close’ suggests that there is also something contained in the enclosed space delineated by the word and its practice; something that is exclusive to it, contained within it and necessarily guarded. And that which is contained in and by the construction of couples as being ‘close’ is not only a form of dyadic connection (proximal as opposed to being ‘tied’ together or joined as ‘one’) but also a mode of emotional expression that in being signified as ‘close’ is always and already contained and exclusive. That is, the etymology of ‘close’ points to how the couple is constituted by the boundaries that shut it off. The semantic properties of the concept ‘close’ in relation to the couple can be seen as functioning to mark out a space and (like ‘bond’ and ‘emotion’) emotionalise that field particularly from the eighteenth century onwards. And this circumscribed space sets up clear parameters around the expression of the emotion that it contains in terms of how it is expressed (or not) and to whom (see chapters five and seven). Like the metaphoric and material space that houses it, this is a protected form of emotion that is closed off to outsiders and intrusion and that cannot seep into that vilified ‘outside’ territory that the concept of closeness helps to produce and polarise in its shutting out function and in which it is presumed that there is something undesirable to be kept at bay. Against this dichotomisation of spaces and territories the emotionality of the couple experience gains its particular status in terms of being exclusive and in need of protection. As De Swann (1990) notes in his discussion of the architecture of intimacy, it is the exclusive character of this space and its privileged, guarded access that provides it with its ‘special’ character. Thus the commonly alluded to ‘specialness’ of being in a ‘close’, ‘intimate’ couple relationship can be seen as the effect of the socio-
historic privileging of a private and exclusive, that is *contained*, bourgeois home and emotional closeness. But there is more to be said on the socio-politically induced value of containment as a predominant theme of eighteenth century European thought.

The verb *to contain* appears in written English circa 1300 and comes from the Latin *continere*, meaning ‘to hold together’ and ‘enclose’. Thus the notion of ‘enclosure’ that came to prescribe emotional expression can be seen as being made possible by that particular power-knowledge apparent in the fourteenth century that, as we have seen, worked to tie, fasten and join objects/subjects together. Moreover, the close etymological relationship between ‘contain’ and ‘continue’ (both deriving from *continere*) suggests a line of thought, conspicuous from the fourteenth century, that if something or someone was to be continuous and ongoing it had to be also containable and contained (Stenner, 1999). The eighteenth century deployment of ‘close’ as a representation and qualifier of emotional connection can be seen as reflecting this particular line of thought wherein objects and people were increasingly made containable. It seems that in order for an emotional connection between (two) people to be continuous it had to also be contained (closed off, exclusive and guarded). Along the same lines the emergent ‘individual’ of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was to be an on-going, constant and coherent entity in its ascribed self-containment (Sampson, 1977, 1989). Thus both notions of an emotional ‘closeness’ and a unitary ‘selfhood’ developed at this time in accordance with a principle of containment that works to ensure their continuity and constancy. That the emerging substances (or ‘essences’) of individuals and emotional connections emerged as being necessarily ‘contained’ can be seen as possibilities (and constructed truths) that are predicated on an *a priori* need to have these things remain *constant* and *regular* so as to remain calculable and governable (Nietzsche, 1887a; Foucault, 1978a). Like the self-contained individual, then, ‘close’ relationships can also be seen as the effect of socio-historic power relations and a specific (liberalist) governmental strategy.

Up to this point I have argued that the coupled-dyad takes on particular forms and draws particular qualities, conducts and values from the metaphoric and spatial imageries that since the fourteenth century have functioned as productive surfaces of emergence for the discursive field of coupledom. Via the kinds of imageries, metaphors, lines of thought and semantic possibilities that have so far been outlined the couple domain has come to be known and practised as one kind of territory and not another; is infused with specific kinds
of affects, obligations, restrictions, privileges, securities, and ‘truths’ while delimiting others. The various significations used in relation to the couple are, therefore, not merely descriptive devices but constructive ones as they work to mark out an exclusive relational enclosure and endow it with specific qualities and emotional performances. Etymologically speaking, the emotionalisation of the couple domain (and other spaces) - and then the containment of those emotions - can be seen as beginning to take on its present form from the late seventeenth and early eighteenth and as being particularly consolidated during the nineteenth century centuries when psyche and soma were conceptually split (Gillis, 1988) and influential socio-political and linguistic forces began acting on (and at the same time producing) the psychologised and emotionalised subject and couple who continued to exist in particular ways by virtue of a privileged self-emotional containment. The sense of intimacy that refers to the exchange of ‘inmost thoughts or feelings and emotions’ is also newly operable at this time, having emerged in accordance with these same conditions of possibility.

4.5 Knowledge of inner-most truth

One potent concept that signifies and constructs the couple connection particularly in regards to making this connection known and visible is the discursive practice of intimacy that announces the territory it is marking out and designates a subjective interiority perhaps more than any other. Etymology records the (transitive) verb ‘to intimâte’ from 1538 where it is first listed as meaning ‘to make known formally, to notify, announce or state’, having derived from the Latin intimat/intimare, meaning ‘to put or bring into, drive or press into, to make known and announce’. Here the act of ‘intimating’ something, or announcing it, carried two seemingly distinct yet related meanings. On the one hand there is the linguistic act or power of announcement, and on the other there is the very physical and penetrative power of a ‘bringing, driving or pressing into’. As I go on to explore in this section, what can be read into the act of ‘intimating’, and therefore ‘of being intimate’ as the etymological derivative of ‘intimâte’, is that the discursive practice of intimacy involved, as it continues to, a form of announcement that specifically worked to bring forth the detailed knowledge and truth of people and of loving relationships while also pressing a form of truth onto (and into) the subject who is compelled to announce it.
Foucault (1985) suggests that the question of truth was injected into relationships of love as a function of Platonic erotics (itself a reflection of ‘man-boy’ love). He reads Aristophanes’ description of the lover’s task (see the ‘Symposium’ in Plato’s Dialogues) as not the search for the other half of himself in another (e.g. Armstrong, 2003), but “to recognise the true nature of the love that has seized him” (Foucault, 1985: 243). In the Platonic notion of love, therefore, love revolves around subjects in terms of the truth they are capable of. “Hence the ethical work he will have to do will be to discover and hold fast, without ever letting go, to that relation to truth which was the hidden medium of his love” (ibid.: 243; emphasis added). Thus from its Platonic specification, the relation between coupledom and ‘truth’ has remained a pervasive and highly constitutive one as can be demonstrated by an analysis of ‘intimacy’ as a potent producer of ‘truthful’ knowledge and as a particular technology of inquiry and authenticity that ostensibly provides access to the ‘truth’ of oneself and one’s relationship.

From the mid seventeenth century intimate denoted ‘the quality or condition of being intimate’ where being ‘intimate’ involved ‘a very close connection or union’ between things. Thus as a type of interpersonal connection, intimacy had clear semantic association with concurrent notions of ‘close’, ‘bond’ and ‘union’ but it specified the connection between people as being predicated on the ‘personal knowledge’ of another. So from the mid seventeenth century onwards an ‘intimate connection’ depended on the announcement and exchange of personal knowledge as a way of being joined or tied. Deriving from its Latin origin intimus, meaning ‘inmost, deepest and profound’, what being ‘intimate’ did significantly involve from this time was a knowledge of an ‘inmost, deep-seated, essential’ nature of a thing or person. Thus the ‘making known’ that intimacy required with regard to interpersonal relations came with the announcement of one’s ‘inmost’ nature or character and a ‘driving or pressing’ into this constructed interiority. By the eighteenth century the connection of intimacy came to involve a self-mutual knowledge of ‘inmost thoughts or feelings’ that ‘proceeded from, concerned or affected one’s inmost self’. Intimacy, then, is clearly imbricated in a politics of self-affirmation wherein “subjectivity is reduced to conscious self-knowledge, which in turn is reduced to that which can already be [known and] articulated” (Stephenson, 2003: 136).
In this way, the relational practice of intimacy is not only predicated on but also actively produces and compels a subject who is in possession of an ‘inmost nature’, who is capable of knowing it and who is able and willing to speak and reveal it. Indeed, unlike other constructions of couple-connection, an ‘intimate’ connection involves the force of articulation by which subjectivities, dyadic connections and the truth of these are made known and ensured. And in this ‘making known’ via the technology of intimacy, knowledge, truth and the hearts and minds of individuals are not merely described and represented but constituted within and by the very practice that would have us announce our innermost being and relinquish secrets. Intimacy, therefore, functions as another constitutive spatial metaphor of ‘selfhood’ (as an interiorised, psychologised individual) as well as of contain(ed)ing couple relationships and is particularly powerful in making the ‘essence’ of each known to oneself and another.

As another signifier of inter-subjectivity, ‘intimacy’ can be seen as an effect of the discourse of individualism which “interpellates the subject as a sovereign and unitary individual” (Malson, 1998: 151). In this discourse of individualism, one based on liberal ideology and a metaphysics of substance (Nietzsche, 1887a; Butler, 1990), the autonomous, self-directed, self-governing individual stands independent from society and social influences (Sampson, 1977). Indeed, by the early eighteenth century the ‘contained self’ (see Sampson, 1977, 1989) had become a central player in the couple domain as a kind of subject who harboured civilities, feelings, sympathies, a sensitive side and an inmost interiority, and who was able to accurately perceive and speak these things (see Foucault, 1978a; Hirst and Woolley, 1982; Shotter and Gergen, 1989). This ‘sensitive’, but also ‘responsible’ individual increasingly came to value sensibility and a capacity for ‘exquisite feeling’ often as a mark of bourgeois superiority (Scull, 1983). Rose (1999) theorises the rise of the individualised, rational, sensitive subject as imbricated in the strategies of civility and responsibilisation “which attempted to construct well-regulated liberty through creating practices of normality, rationality and sensibility” (ibid.: 72). To this I would add the ideologies of containment and constancy as further organisational and regulatory principles. These practices, Rose goes on to argue, “governed through freedom to the extent that they sought to invent the condition in which subjects themselves would enact the responsibilities that composed their liberties” (ibid.: 72). And to this again I would add the strategy of privatisation that also constructs a
'well-regulated liberty' in the form of a privately owned and freely enacted ‘intimacy’ for which the individual is responsible.

So lodged in and enabled by the discourse of individualism, and also of romance, authenticity and truth, the practice of ‘intimacy’ reflects the development of a ‘self’ who is increasing ascribed the capacity for experiencing emotions, who is able to recognise this in others, and who deploys such individually known affect to connect with another or others (Stone, 1997). By situating the emergence of couple-intimacy in its etymological and historical context one can begin to appreciate its penetrative imageries and functions and its capacity for producing potent power effects. Indeed, ‘intimacy’ and ‘penetration’ are linked by their common formation on the Latin model of *intus*, meaning ‘within’. Thus the particular force of intimacy, I want to argue, is a penetrative one; a force that thrusts itself directly into the ‘inner core’ or ‘essence’ of the subject, right into the mental and emotive spaces of the individual. In this way, the ‘intimate couple’ is discursively constituted as capable of an aggressive intra- and inter-subjective penetrability whereby discernment and insight into one’s/another’s innermost essence is the result of a forceful thrust into minds, soul and feelings. Importantly, the action of ‘entering’ into another (*intrare*) as a predominant basis for interconnection is not a passive one. Rather the intimate subject is made up and propelled by the active penetration of another via a relational technology that provides its own warrant for intrusion while at the same time producing that which is to be intruded upon. So then, as from the eighteenth century, this closing up of subjects whereby they (we) are constituted as self-contained, unitary individuals, can be seen as the necessary pre-condition for the possibility of intimate penetration and as that which makes this penetration necessary for the regulation of subjects who are now constituted as interiorised, contained and closed off (yet ‘free’) essences. We would not know ourselves as ‘being intimate’ or as having such a predisposition or desire if it was not first required of us, inserted into our ‘core’ and made the conductor for a ‘true’ knowledge of ourselves and others. On the basis of the semantic linkage between intimacy, penetralia and the act of entering, it is of no surprise that intimacy came to be so euphemistically collapsed with sex.
4.6 Regulatory penetrations

It was from 1889 that ‘being intimate’ served as a euphemism for sexual intercourse. Not only, then, did intimacy refer to the ‘innermost’ truth of minds and souls, from the late nineteenth century it was also linked to the practice of sex. As the concept of sexual love was first recorded in 1588 (meaning sexual intercourse), the semantic convergence of love and sex can be said to have occurred before ‘intimacy’ was in circulation in English. But as ‘intimacy’ became linked to the practice of sex, and therefore also of love, from the nineteenth century the discursive practices of love, sex and intimacy began to merge, deflect meanings and share values. It can be proposed, therefore, that the power of intimacy inserted itself into, assimilated, and helped shape the already existing ideas of love and sex such that the way these discursive practices were performed took on a particular trajectory that was closely aligned with what it meant to be ‘intimate’ in terms of the communication of truth.

From this semantic convergence emerged references to sexual engagement as ‘making love’ and as having ‘intimate relations’. That we do so is not representational of a true nature of sexual activity but is more indicative of the meanings that have come to be ascribed to ‘sex’ once it converged with the discursive practices of love, intimacy and truth (Foucault, 1978a; cf. Simon, 1996). To explicate the point, insofar as the semantic convergence is a euphemistic one, the semantic association of sex-love-intimacy can be interpreted as taking form as a matter of social politeness and thus of bourgeois social regulation. Originating from the Greek ‘to speak well of’, Abrams (1971) defines a ‘euphemism’ as a word that is used instead of a term considered to be too vulgar to directly utter. It is a polite substitute for disagreeable, offensive or terrifying words. In the same way that ‘disagreeable’ references to death, irreligious references to God, as well as a host of bodily functions are spoken of euphemistically, ‘sex’ came to be spoken well of as ‘making love’ or as being ‘intimate’ so as not to offend bourgeois sensibilities. Hence, perhaps, the subsequent cultural and moral compulsion to perform love, sex and intimacy almost as the one act (in their euphemistic convergence) can be seen as a function of seventeenth and eighteenth century sensibility and as a condition for the nineteenth century constructions of the ‘pleasures’ and ‘truths’ of sex – a constructed ‘truth of sex’ that Foucault (1978a) relates to the regulation of the bourgeois family and hence of society. And the moralising sensibility that oversees the convergence of
sex, love and intimacy does not spontaneously emerge or operate independently from other relations of power and mechanisms of restraint that supposedly ensure the constancy and truth of relationships and people but is the effect of a complex political technology for the creation, penetration and control of bodies, emotions and conduct (Foucault, 1978a).

Kant expressed this sensibility, and the moral discourse that frames it, most acutely in his understanding of sex as “mutual masturbation salvageable by human love” (cited in Baker and Elliston, 1975: 8). Love and intimacy joined forces to salvage a ‘sinful’ sex that had to be redeemed at least for procreative purposes in the context of monogamous marriage. And out of this resolution – one in which the deployments of love and intimacy played such a significant part (Baker and Elliston, 1975) – love and intimacy were themselves being constituted and ascribed redeeming properties. But intimacy worked to do more than salvage an inherently evil sex. I suggest that one of its most potent effects is the redemption of the solitary, autonomous individual who through the affective conduit and subjectification of ‘intimacy’ could know a kind of self-fulfilment or completeness in having one’s innermost truth disclosed, penetrated and realised most intensely in intimate relationships of the couple kind. The organising ‘micro’ power of the subjective and relational technology of intimacy can be seen as being most productive in the way in which it is played out as a game of ‘truth’ requiring no less than the honest announcements of self-relational authenticities that are continually under examination. In short, the power of the technology of intimacy is that it presupposes, makes possible, and then demands a visibility of ‘innermost’ details by which the couple relationship is further normalised and regulated and the individualised and contained subject disciplined.

4.7 The discipline of visibility

With the seventeenth and eighteenth century deployment of ‘intimacy’ couple relationships can be seen as being increasingly made a site for the production, enactment, and monitoring of personal, moral, and emotional ‘realities’. As suggested, the particular aggression of the construct is alluded to in its historic senses of ‘driving and pressing into’ as it functions to ‘make known’ these realities and guarantee their assumed truths. In this way, the etymologies of ‘intimate’ and ‘intimacy’ show that deployment of the condition/practice opened up the floodgate for the emergent imperative to tell by which the values of sharing, honesty and
communication gain their momentum as indicators of the ‘good’, ‘authentic’ relationship. The point here is that the current practice of intimacy and discursive constructions of the intimate subject explicitly command a perpetual *telling* by which the required knowledges, honesties and self-disclosures bring into full view every detail of thought, bodies, and conduct that in being made visible are effectively monitored, recorded and governed.

In *Discipline and Punish* Foucault (1977a) theorises this process of things, attitudes, movements and bodies being made visible as a crucial aspect of a disciplinary ‘political anatomy of power’ or ‘micro-physics of power’ that involves a network of meticulous and often minute regulatory techniques. This political anatomy, he argues, involves a multiplication of subtle and cunning, often minor “coercions that act upon the body [in a] calculated manipulation of its elements, its gestures, and its behaviours” (ibid.: 138). According to Foucault this political anatomy of power specifically involves a “political economy of detail” (ibid.: 139) in its calling forth the details of our innermost selves and in assigning meaning to our emotional and physical pleasures. It is through a requirement to offer up a detailed and exact knowledge of ourselves which is then supervised, observed and examined through a multiplicity of means and methods that we are made knowable and become useful in specific ways. Discipline, therefore, is exercised through meticulous and minor observation of detail. Foucault understands the modern individual of the Classical Age (seventeenth and eighteenth centuries) as being produced by this disciplinary process and its detailed examination and observation of bodies and selves.

“The individual is no doubt the fictitious atom of an ‘ideological representation of society but he [sic] is also a reality fabricated by this specific technology of power that I have called ‘discipline’ … [P]ower produces; it produces reality, it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production.”

(Foucault, 1977a: 194)

Furthermore, Foucault sees the disciplinary aspects of these ‘circuits of communication’ or processes and methods of ‘making known’ as always and ever under examination in having been brought forth and made visible. That is to say, being examined, observed and under surveillance plays a central role in the operation of discipline. Foucault refers to this as the “economy of visibility” wherein “it is the fact of being constantly seen, of being able always to be seen, that maintains the disciplined individual in his subjection” (ibid: 187). Foucault’s
theorisation of Panopticism (see chapter seven) as an exemplar of discipline that produces a disciplined population by making people always visible and that makes power anonymous in its invisibility, makes clear the power relations at work in general society as we in fact come to be disciplined (and self-discipline) by being under the constant surveillance of, and then internalising, the ‘normalising gaze’ that, he argues, became the new form of (non-sovereign) disciplinary power in the Classical Age.

According to a Foucauldian perspective, and as the above analysis has highlighted, practices of ‘closeness’ and ‘intimacy’ in particular can be seen as effective spaces and technologies of surveillance in the service of a ‘political anatomy of discipline’ wherein subjects are not “amputated, repressed or altered” (Foucault, 1977a: 198) so much as constituted and regulated in and by their visibility. The discursive practice of intimacy and its principle dictates of announcement and self-disclosure, like that of closeness and its dictate of containment, is one of the “circuits of communication [that] support an accumulation and a centralisation of knowledge” (ibid.: 220) for political, disciplinary and regulatory purposes. As a meticulous mechanism of power that disciplines and normalises by making an individual’s every detail and entire truth known and visible, and thereby examinable, intimacy (as much as the other concepts and discursive conduits discussed) is at the same time producing ‘reality’, domains of objects and rituals of truth. Drawing on this perspective, ‘honesty’ and ‘communication’ are to be understood as two such rituals of truth, or associated economies of visibility made operable by a political anatomy of discipline as Foucault conceptualises it.

In English, ‘honesty’, from the Latin honestus, is an older idea than that of ‘communication’, though not by much. Coinciding with the introduction of ‘intimacy’ that from the seventeenth century helped to establish a personal interiority and confirm this space (or substance) as possessing emotions, secrets and truth, the etymological movement of ‘honesty’ takes on similar turns. In its earlier (and now obsolete) use as a signifier for the ‘qualities of being’ - for example, handsome, decent, respectable, hospitable and, for women, chaste - the quality of honesty just prior to the sixteenth century was not directly associated with the idea of truth. From around the late sixteenth century, however, the word began to assimilate the qualities of ‘truth’ and ‘integrity’. Etymological analysis suggests that at this time ‘honesty’ took on its status as that which could distinguish truth from lies – a
distinction that, more than social decency and female chastity and so on, appeared to become a vital measure for the uprightness of disposition and character (Nietzsche, 1887a; Foucault, 1973b). Though always in various ways used to demarcate the good from the bad, ‘honesty’ moved from being merely about ‘good character’, disposition and how one conducted oneself, to also concern what one spoke and the truthfulness of that articulation.

The point at which communication sprang from meaning ‘the sharing, giving and the making common of abstract and intangible qualities such as light, heat, motion and senses’ to specifically involve the ‘sharing, transmission and exchange of information and thought’ by way of speech (as well as writing and signs) dates from around the same time that honesty came to denote ‘articulated truth’. From the seventeenth century onwards, then, one did not merely communicate oneself through ‘familiar relations and a generalised intercourse that hinged on the sharing of information concerning material and divine things, duty and external fact’ as had previously been the case. At this time the idea of communication began to centre on the ‘conveyance of one’s thoughts, feelings and internal state for the purpose of gaining understanding or sympathy’. There was, therefore, an increasing requirement to ‘communicate’ details about oneself and to understand others as they revealed details about themselves; a requirement that Foucault (1978a) sees as being particularly acute in the nineteenth century in relation to the truth of one’s sexual conduct and desire. Coupled with an incitement to ‘communicate’ particularly about one’s innermost self, etymologies of ‘intimacy’ and ‘honesty’ show that there was a proliferation of multiple technologies of selfhood by and through which the ‘self’ could and must be truthfully transmitted to others and thereby guided and regulated by the normalising gaze of disciplinary power.

Foucault (1978a) writes of this communicative incitement particularly in regard to the object of sex and the Catholic confessional. “The Christian pastoral prescribed as a fundamental duty the task of passing everything to do with sex through the endless mill of speech” (ibid.: 21). But the constitutive effects and power implications of this ‘endless mill of speech’ or discursive growth passed beyond a knowledge and regulation of sex and Foucault also dates from the seventeenth century a general “infinite task of telling – telling oneself and another, as often as possible, everything that might concern the interplay of innumerable pleasures, sensations and thoughts…” (Foucault, 1978a: 20). For Foucault (1978a: 33) “an immense verbosity is what our civilisation has required and organised” since the power politics of the
Classical Age came to involve “an infinitesimal power over the active body” (Foucault, 1977a: 137) in the “political anatomy of detail” (ibid.: 139). And it was matrimonial relations, argues Foucault (1978a), that were particularly beset by this politically useful verbosity during the course of the eighteenth century.

“The marriage was the most intense focus of constraints; it was spoken of more than anything else; more than any other relation, it was required to give a detailed account of itself.”

(Foucault, 1978a: 37).

Hence, like sexuality, the discursive field of coupledom is to be understood as “an especially dense transfer point for relations of power” (ibid.: 103) that has “as one of its chief objectives to reproduce the interplay of relations and maintain the law that governs them” (ibid: 106).

The point to be reiterated from these etymological scannings of associated imperatives to tell and disclose truth is that they served a useful political purpose as economies of visibility in a power regime not explicitly concerned with one’s submission to duty, service or influence but to an apparent need to speak the truth and be understood in every detail. Thus it needs to be acknowledged that the discursive practices of coupledom are not merely working as key ingredients of couple success, relational quality, or personal happiness. As I have suggested in the discussion above, these relational practices are to be re-interpreted as specific types of knowledge formation and acquisition that are inextricably linked to the exercise of power. And they are so because these principles of knowledge/truth revelation involve the distribution, proliferation, and recording of knowledges about people, their ‘innermost’ thoughts, their emotional spaces, feeling and conducts in the service of a political anatomy of detail by which we are supervised, observed, and examined. Adhered-to values of the ‘good’, ‘honest’, ‘intimate’, ‘close’ and ‘bonded’ relationship work to open up spaces of intelligibility, of personhood, and produce disciplined individuals either by way of submission to duty, influence and prohibition and/or by a compulsion to disclose.

In short, the self-mutual observation and examination of the ‘truth’ assumed to reside in the ‘innermost’ spaces of the psychologised and emotionalised individual can be interpreted as the exercise of meticulous and subtle control wherein the individual and the couple are at the
same time being produced according to the kind of normalising detail that ‘should’ be known, felt, expressed, kept constant and guarded. As we deploy and value the various technologies of connection and truth-telling so far outlined, we are simultaneously documented, assessed, and constituted. In the kind of minute detail concerning bodies, their inmost regions, sexual and emotional pleasures, sensations, desires, conducts, and hoped for futures that are all to be announced and examined by virtue of the ‘well managed’ couple relationship, this relational arrangement, particularly by the end of the eighteenth century, can be seen as enabling a highly penetrative form of the subjugating and normalising gaze. But while coupledom is now not (overtly) represented and regulated so much by obligation and conformity to moral-economic norms, as the union of marriage once was/is, and indeed is frequently represented as a matter of free choice and individual fulfilment, power is not to be overlooked in terms of how it organises and governs those “lifestyle decisions made by autonomous individuals seeking to fulfil themselves and gain personal happiness” (Rose, 1999: 86; cf. Foucault, 1978b).

4.8 The discipline of constancy

A further aspect to the production, restriction, containment, normalisation and examination of forms of inter-connectedness and emotional conduct is another potent technology of subjugation and investigation that specifically guarantees the truthfulness of individuals and relationships and that assures conformity to those standards being established. The *Oxford English Dictionary of Etymology* (1966) refers to *trust* as having an obscure history primarily because of the absence of Old English evidence. There is, however, an explicit and interesting semantic association between ‘trust’ and ‘thrust’ in that they derive from the closely aligned Old Norse words of *thrysta* (‘to thrust or press’) and *treysta* (‘to trust’). On this basis, I suggest, the discursive practice of ‘trust’ assumes a penetrative force similar to that described in the productive apparatus so far outlined. ‘Trust’ (noun and verb) is recorded in English from 1225 with the meaning ‘(to have) confidence in or reliance on some quality or attribute of a person or thing, or the truth of a statement’. Whatever quality, attribute or truth people (or things) have first been accredited with, in its earliest derivation ‘trust’ can be read as another’s confident reliance on such accreditations as somehow being real or factually true and correct. Now it is with regard to the kinds of subjects and conducts that the discipline of trust specifies as necessary for this kind of conformation of reality and fact
that its incisive force functions as a very specific form of disciplinary power. And this can be seen as also being implicit in Foucault’s (1977a; 1978a) theorisation of discipline where the knowledge gained of the subject through examination, confession and so forth – that is, through a technology of discipline that penetrates the subject - must be a ‘true’ knowledge if it is to have its full disciplinary effect.

As a potential object of ‘trust’ the (trusted, trustworthy) individual is made worthy of another’s confidence in being consistent to the hope, expectation or credit extended by another. From an etymological analysis it can be suggested that in order to be ‘trusted’ one is not merely required to be honest or true but to act faithfully, dependably and reliably, to responsibly demonstrate and be these things. Such a requirement, or more specifically such a duty, obliges no less than a regulative consistency of self, a coherence and stability of both conduct and of ‘being’ as a matter of ‘good conscience’. In relation to love and friendship, and in line with the earlier discussion of ‘containment’, ‘trust’ (circa. 1300 to 1610) meant a consistency of people, relationships, and/or affections in terms of ‘not changing’ and being ‘constant’. Hence the trustworthy subject is normalised in being necessarily constant, regular and predictable in conduct, thought and identity under the trusting gaze of (an)other(s). Concurrent with this, from 1300 the word stable in reference to people (and their domiciles) also denoted being ‘stationary’ and ‘keeping to one place’ and thus likewise functions as a mode of discipline that maintains the ‘stable’ subject and relationship as easily monitored and accountable.

That trust was from the early sixteenth century (and still is) understood as an act of duty is made clear by the sense of the word denoting ‘imposed obligation or responsibility’. Indeed principles of ‘obedience’, ‘fidelity’, ‘obligation’, ‘credit/debt’, and ‘ownership’ heavily infuse various meanings of this legalistic construct (Nietzsche, 1887a), all of which prescribe a dutiful, economic basis for relationships of exchange (coupled or otherwise) that deploy the notion of trust to mark out the character of the relationship (as constant and faithful) and the partners involved (as being dependable and thus consistent with themselves and norms of duty). As such, the consistency required by ‘trust’ and ‘trustworthiness’, together with the immobility inherent in words like ‘stability’ and ‘enclosure’, can be seen as an economic principle of fixed exchange that develops so predominantly during the period of industrialisation and the rise of capitalist economics (Foucault, 1978a; Deleuze and Guattari,
That we, our couple relationships and our domesticities are ‘ideally’ constant, stable and fixed are directly attributable to a capitalist power politics intent in rendering people and couples essentially immobile in order to sustain a permanent work force, maintain the social body and thereby perpetuate itself (Deleuze and Guattari, 1977; Foucault, 1978a; Rose, 1999). Drawing on Foucault’s (1978a) discussion of the ‘system of alliance’ (one that involves the family more generally), the discursive practices of coupledom can be seen as being particularly tied to a capitalist agenda because of this domain’s role in the transmission of wealth and its purpose of maintaining the “homeostasis of the social body” (Foucault, 1978a: 107).

In advancing the ideals of consistency, balance, fair trade, and predictability, ‘trust’ - like the technologies of union, bond, attachment, stability and close - actively prohibits deviation or variation from the very details and standards of truth that it polices and assures. It is not enough that one know, reveal and speak all manner of truthful knowledges about what, where, and who one is - the individual, if he or she is to be endowed with the esteemed quality of ‘trust’ and thereby enabled to experience stable relationships, is through this vocabulary of coupledom constituted as having a duty to be consistent with a set of normative and disciplinary, moral-economic standards. In being accredited with the ability to know and honestly speak the truth about oneself and one’s experiences, the ‘trusted’ individual is obliged to make promises and offer guarantees that pertain to a consistent adherence to these things (Nietzsche, 1887a). Thus a significant function of trust is that it continually polices and re-produces who we are, where we are, what we do and desire, and how we experience our own subjectivities and our intimate exchanges. Of trust it can be said that the practice assumes (while it helps to instigate and penetrate) a coherent, relatively static, self-examining subject who is obliged to conform to, and continually re-affirm, her innermost knowledge and truth, the exchange of this, and the stabilisation of the detail procured. As the individual is effectively disciplined and normalised in being compelled to confess every detail about him/herself and by internalising the network of normalising gazes that acts upon him/her (Foucault, 1978a, 1977a; see chapter seven for Foucault’s account of panoptic power), in being trusted, trustworthy and of ‘good conscience’ the individual similarly internalises disciplinary power and is therefore significantly normalised by virtue of trust.
The way in which the moral/ethical technology of trust works to produce and ensure a discursive and material field of constant, immobile and predictable subjects in the couple domain is not independent of the practices and powers of ‘union’, ‘bondedness’, ‘closeness’ and ‘intimacy’. In constructing couples as inextricably linked, as economically bound, morally dutiful, as emotionally contained and on guard, and as bound to speak the truth of themselves and be ‘trustworthy’, these connective and spatialising semantics all work to manufacture a fixed, constant, and stabilised couple experience, one that is policed by trust in particular. These activating semantics of the couple-vocabulary effectively reinforce each other as do the disciplinary operations of duty, visibility and constancy. But there is to be explored a further (and by no means the only other) aspect to the realm of coupledom - that of the economy of couple-pleasures which can be seen to stabilise, make constant and regulate in its emphasis on moderation.

4.9 Conditions of couple satisfaction

In his later work Foucault theorises subjectivity, particularly in relation to practices of (sexual) desire and pleasure, more explicitly in terms of ‘technologies of self’ that he sees as being predicated on an aesthetics, or an ‘ethics of existence’. In *The Use of Pleasure* (1985) the emphasis Foucault gives to relations of normalising power concerns not so much an economy of visibility-observation-detail, but the kinds of aesthetic self-affirmations that are warranted by an *economy of pleasure*. For Foucault this economy of pleasure is both determined by, and is the result of, a self-mastery that is enacted by the ‘ethical subject’. He sees this particular economy, or self-technology, as being predicated on the subject’s search for truth about oneself, one that is “ensured by the control that is exercised by oneself over oneself” (ibid.: 244). Hence relations of disciplinary power are developed to also involve those methods and exercises generated by an ‘art of existence’ wherein we take on a particular ethical relation to ourselves.

Foucault (1985) embarks on a genealogical analysis of the ethical subject in pagan culture and, as he had done with the politics of power in *Discipline and Punish*, sets up two ‘ideal’ types of moral systems as ‘Wills to Truth’ that are not entirely distinct but co-exist. He characterises the first system as involving secular ‘ethical practice’ and associates it with Greco-Roman antiquity. Here subjectification revolves around a subject who ‘freely’ relates
to himself. Moral codes and prescriptions are less explicit but the methods and techniques of self-formation within relationships (heterosexual marriage and man-boy relationships in particular) are very pronounced. In the second system, associated with early Christianity, Foucault argues that modes of subjectification are more explicitly referred to those sets of laws that are exemplified by monotheistic religious systems. Drawing up parallels and disassociations between the two moral systems along the way, Foucault explores the requirements not of Judeo-Christian ‘self-awareness’ so much as ethical ‘self-formation’ and traces aspects of this through to the modern Christian era. So in his analysis, Foucault (1985: 30) focuses on:

“…the forms of relations with the self, on the methods and techniques by which he works them out, on the exercises by which he makes of himself an object to be known, and on the practices that enable him to transform his whole mode of being.”

In short, subjectivity is theorised as involving an aesthetics of ‘self-mastery’ that is constructed as ‘freedom’ and associated with Truth (Foucault, 1985: 91). And these ethical practices of ‘self-mastery’ that function in an economy of pleasure can, I suggest, be seen as being imbricated in the etymology of *satisfaction*. My emphasis here is not so much on the couple-pleasures of sexual gratification *per se*, but on the way in which historical meanings of ‘satisfaction’ infuse a pleasure (and truth) of *moderation* into the couple domain and constitute a masterful (coupled) subject who is ‘satisfied’ by the containment of excess as much as by the containment of substance and structure.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* (1992) records ‘satisfaction’ as having two distinct, yet related sets of meanings that were largely in circulation at the same time. The first, dating from the fourteenth to the late nineteenth century, pertains to the obligations of payment of debts, atonement, compensation and punishment as reparation of sin and injury. The second set of meanings, dating from the sixteenth century to the present, refer to desires and feelings, and specifically the gratification of these. Thus the etymology of ‘satisfaction’ involves the moral realm of economic and Christian duties (to make good) on the one hand, and on the other hand, the psychological realm of desire and pleasure. While this bifurcation in the etymology of ‘satisfaction’ can be read as involving two distinct meanings, they can also be read as converging inasmuch as sexual and emotional satisfaction can be understood as the fantasy
of making good the lack in the self (a Lacanian notion of the ego’s conception of desire but also discernable from the post-structuralist notion of the unitary, whole ‘self’ as being a fiction; Henriques et al, 1984). ‘Satisfaction’ involved both the act of satisfying (God and the State) and the psychological condition of being satisfied (in mind) with both indicating a submission to various authorities be they religious, judicial and/or moral.

This bifurcated aspect of the etymology of ‘satisfaction’ is consistent with a Foucauldian analysis of ethics in that it highlights an economy of satisfactions amounting to the fulfilment of various obligations that are largely determined by a sovereign power or creditor and then, most notably from the mid-nineteenth century, being supplanted by a liberally re-worked ‘complete fulfilment of desire, appetite, or supply of a want’ as determined and experienced by a self-satisfying, ‘free’, psychological subject. What is satisfied in this latter case is specifically a ‘contented state of mind’. In that the subject is now being made a desiring participator in a liberal, individualised economy of pleasures, one is no longer obligated to atone for sin or repay debt but to responsibly assume and organise one’s own gratification and pleasure and to know (and experience) this as psychological contentment. As this etymological shift occurred, there seemed to be in circulation at the same time senses of ‘satisfaction’ to do with release from suspense, uneasiness, or uncertainty, and removal of doubt, all seemingly achieved by a proximity to or acceptance of truth. So a relation to truth remains integral to ‘contented minds’ with regards to ‘satisfaction’ as much as to other self-technologies as discussed. And, similarly, this relation to truth came to be achieved not by overt domination and moral force but by the fulfilment of ‘correct’ desires and ‘acceptable’ pleasures and gratifications (Foucault, 1985).

This idea, originating with Plato and Aristotle and remaining pervasive, that true contentment, acceptable or correct desire is a reflection of what is perceived as being ‘good’ is further evidenced by the very early senses of pleasure (from 1420) wherein ‘good’ and ‘desirable’ are semantically synonymous, remaining so up to the present. Consistent with Greco-Roman philosophy, in the etymology of ‘pleasure’ what is not good pleasure is ‘sensuous enjoyment as a chief object of life or end in itself’ (recorded from 1526 to 1976) or the physical ‘indulgence of appetites’. While the analysis of this chapter is by no means exhaustive no other word investigated was accredited meaning according to the specification
of an unfavourable aspect. In this the regulative and constitutive power of an ethically (self) determined pleasure and satisfaction that is conditional on that which is avoided, is apparent.

I develop the last point by considering the kinds of moral/ethical principles that continued to constitute the ‘relation to truth’ in the economy of pleasure as enacted by the desiring, ethical individual of the seventeenth century and up to the present. Here again Foucault’s (1985) analysis of the ethical subject is useful. Central to his thesis is that ways in which the ‘self’ of the fourth century B.C. makes him or herself an object to be known were intricately tied up with the ethical “practices that enable him to transform his whole being” (ibid.: 30). Foucault situates the exercises of a ‘masterful’ self-transformation as being bound up with a pagan economy of pleasure that he describes as a “meticulous economy that would discourage unnecessary indulgence” (ibid.: 250); an economy that was then consolidated and transformed by the Christian principle of self-renunciation. Accordingly, Foucault suggests that the essence of sexual fidelity was not only found in the act of monogamy itself but also in the (male) mastery of ‘unfavourable’ desires ³, in the combat against them, and in the strength to resist them such that, for men in particular, it was not a sense of morality that required only conjugal fidelity so much as a complete mastery of self (ibid.). And the resolution of this perceived tension of desires circulating in an agonistic field of pleasurable forces that were considered difficult to control came with a strategy of moderate conduct on which this self-mastery was predicated. Hence an ethics of pleasure came to involve “the form of effort and control that the individual must apply to himself in order to become moderate” in the seeking of satisfaction through pleasure (ibid.: 65). In this way, argues Foucault, the ‘relation to truth’ in classical antiquity was not “about obligation to speak truthfully but for establishing the individual as a moderate subject leading a life of moderation” (ibid.: 89; emphasis added).

Foucault (1985: 244) interprets Platonic moderation as representing a life “that is mild in every way, with gentle pains and gentle pleasures, a life characterised by desires that are mild

³ Here neither I or Foucault am suggesting that the church was concerned only with male sexual ‘sin’. Tied up with the male mastery of desire Foucault is alluding to here there is, for example, the Christian vilification of female bodies and sexuality wherein women were regarded by the church as a source of temptation for instance (see Ussher, 1997b; Malson, 1998).
and loves that are not mad.” 4 Ethical experience, therefore, involved a division between lesser and greater, between moderation and excess, and between self-restraint and self-indulgence. According to Foucault’s analysis, and concomitant with a Nietzschean perspective, such a philosophy of moderation represented a “Grand pathology of excess” (ibid.: 43). Indeed in distinguishing between kinds of pleasure, Aristotle (Ethics, Bk. 8) construes ‘good and necessary’ pleasures as not admitting to excess. In viewing love as a kind of excess in his ‘doctrine of the mean’ (a right balance of excess and deficiency), Aristotle argues that “such a feeling is naturally directed towards one person” (Ethics, Bk. 8) thereby positing the principle of dyadic pairing as a matter of virtuous moderation. Now while, as Foucault suggests, the ethical subject of the modern era came to be constituted in different ways according to recognitions of moral prohibitions and an altered construction of ‘desire’ (see Foucault, 1985: 92), such a ‘grand pathology of excess’ is clearly evident in twentieth century Freudian theory and in a psychoanalytically cultivated society (see Parker, 1997b).

In his theorising of the ‘pleasure principle’, Freud (1920) can be read as observing these kinds of tensions when he refers to the struggle for pleasure in mental life between the two largely hostile principles of ‘pleasure’ and ‘reality’. Freud writes of the pleasure principle (largely about sex) as that which works on mental apparatus to minimise excitation and make life generally easier - but even that docility requires further taming. He suggests that under the ego’s instinct for self-preservation, the pleasure principle is replaced by the reality principle not for the purpose of stopping pleasure per se but for an explicit need to postpone satisfaction and its possibilities in the name of a kind of contented constancy that Nietzsche (1887a: 119) had previously denounced as the “cramps of an unknown happiness”. But for Freud, the reality principle which makes unpleasure tolerable while constraining satisfaction,

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4 For Plato the setting in order of a virtuous and happy ‘inner life’ leads to “one entirely temperate and perfectly adjusted nature” (Republic, iv: 161) that always acts to preserve this harmonious condition. Aristotle refers to this same sense of virtue when he exhorts that “Happiness is an activity of the soul in accordance with perfect virtue (Ethics, 8: 87, emphasis added). See Nietzsche’s Genealogy of Morals (1887a) for a similar critique of the ‘aesthetic (priestly, noble) ideal’ and the stoic values of moderation as prescribed in Classical and Christian thought, and in the philosophies of Schopenhauer, Spinoza and Kant, or example, wherein the ‘masterful, ethical self’ is constituted as a battleground of transcendental virtues that “deny the very foundations of life” (Nietzsche, 1887a: 102). For Nietzsche, the Judeo-Christian installation and pursuit of a virtuous morality is what makes modest and tames a soul that is “voluntarily divided against itself” (ibid.: 68). In his vehement critique Nietzsche argues that “the values of these values itself should first of all be called into question” (ibid.: 8) and that “the progress of this poison [i.e. synthetic valuations of good and evil and the accompanying practices of bad conscience and self-abnegation] through the entire body of mankind seems inexorable” (ibid.: 21).
is a good thing in ensuring “the abandonment of a number of possibilities of gaining satisfaction and the temporary toleration of unpleasure as a step on the long indirect road to pleasure” (cited in Gay, 1995: 596). Such a denial of excess and its possibilities in this economy of pleasure, I would argue, both warrants and constructs a couple ‘satisfaction’ that is necessarily constrained and contained insofar as the pleasure gained in the exclusivity of dyadic monogamy (as one example of a masterful, ‘moderat(ed)ing’ pleasure) – is qualified and validated as ‘pleasurable’ according to this ‘grand pathology of excess’. That is, monogamous couple-satisfaction becomes ‘pleasurable’ in relation to an ‘excess’ that is to be kept at bay. The containment and stabilisation of emotions, satisfactions, pleasures and resources so fundamental to the traditions of coupledom can be re-interpreted, therefore, as values, or relations to truth, that are made intelligible within an historically contingent ethical project of aesthetic self-mastery that emphasises an ideal of moderation and which thus also re-articulates Freud’s argument that satisfaction cannot be fully achieved.

Moderation and restraint as pathways to ‘satisfaction’ is clearly in operation in the ideals and practices of couple commitment, as the subsequent analyses highlight. Referring back to the discussion of couple ‘commitment’ in chapter two, levels of commitment are gauged by psychology as one indicator and predictor of couple satisfaction and stability. One such gauge, according to models of exchange and equity, is whether or not alternatives to being in a relationship are perceived as offering a greater potential reward than the cost of staying in the relationship. If the costs and rewards are balanced, if needs are met, if constraints of various kinds (e.g. moral or pragmatic) are justified, and if there is freedom from doubt, one is seen as being ‘satisfied’ and the commitment likely to be maintained. In the psychology of relational satisfaction, then, there is an explicit sense of ‘satisfied contentment’ relative to the degree to which a sought-after containment is not disturbed or tempted by an ‘excessive’ desire for something else.

Conveyed in all of this is a subject gaining mastery, and thereby a sense of satisfaction, in a strength to resist temptation as played out in the “division between lesser and greater, moderation and excess, self-restraint and self-indulgence” (Foucault, 1985: 43). Perhaps the ultimate ‘fidelity’ of coupledom is its aversion to excess and a loyal adherence to the ethic of a contained and masterful moderation. Not only are the couple and the coupled-subject disciplined by the influence of moral-economic duty, connective and affective conduits,
closed-off containments, and the visibilities and examinations of truth-telling and the
enactment of ‘trustworthiness’, this domain and its warranted (gendered and sexual)
identities are further regulated by the pleasurable moderations and disciplines of
‘satisfaction’.

4.10 Conclusion

This first chapter of analysis has offered a brisk perambulation through various circuits of
meaning, etymological transformations, semantic eruptions and convergences in an attempt
to chart something of the linguistic ‘surfaces of emergence’ and ‘conditions of possibility’
(Foucault, 1972) that have enabled and shaped the discursive domain of contemporary
coupledom. I have but scratched the linguistic and socio-political surfaces on which the trails
and ‘truths’ of coupledom have taken on their particular form over time, acknowledging that
we can never know the precise archaeological structure of our present knowledge (Foucault,
1971) or discern in its entirety a history of things that stretches out far behind them
(Nietzsche, 1887a). Yet as an analytic tool, etymology has been useful as a way of exploring
some of the semantic contingencies that have coloured meaning, systems of thought and
experience in relation to pairing while also drawing on Foucauldian analyses of power,
discipline and ethics as useful interpretive frameworks. While not strictly a genealogy as
Nietzsche and Foucault conceived and practiced it (see Foucault, 1971, for a discussion of
the method), in tracing the semantic contingencies and systems of thought as conditions of
possibility for the present play of coupledom my etymological analysis is in many ways
similar to a genealogy – a de(re)construction of history and knowledge that traces the system
of ‘dependencies’ of a discourse so as to explore how it comes to be what it is in the present
(Henriques et al, 1984).

In particular, this analysis has explored the power-knowledges of couple connection,
emotional containment, and self-relational authenticity; the disciplinary and stabilising
economies of visibility and constancy, and the moderating economy of ‘satisfied’ pleasure. In
pulling the various threads together what can be gleamed from this analysis is that the
normalising psychology, processes, disciplines and ‘realities’ of coupledom are all made
possible – indeed compelled by – a particular relation to Truth according to which the
(coupled) subject from the seventeenth century came to increasingly know itself and be
known by others. And significantly that which constitutes such a relation to truth was (and is) no less than an ‘authenticity’ of contained, constant, stable selves and relationships that are to be compulsively and comprehensively confirmed and examined in these conditions not by mere submission to duty, service and influence but by the active revelation of (and penetrations into) a psychologised and emotionalised subjective interiority, and by the deployment of ethical self-technologies by which constancies and moderations are to be brought into line and managed. In this incitement to announce and disclose, in the very technologies and practices that we deploy as means of connecting, of examining various authenticities and of remaining contained and constant, we are always and already being produced in particular ways. We are, in short, constituted, disciplined and regulated in the process of becoming the ‘truth’ of our selves and living the ‘real’ relationship of emotional substance.

The various fictions that function in truth (Foucault, 1977e), as outlined, can be seen as socio-historically construed lures to ‘normalised’ conduct, experience, and belief. And what this process of normalisation and its series of enabling technologies organises is a form of coupledom that binds people together in ways that privilege and perpetuate an ‘order’ of relational containment, stability, regularity, and constancy. This is an ‘order’ that ensures we remain productive as ethical subjects in ways that support a reigning political project and economic system (Foucault, 1978a; Donzelot, 1979; Rose, 1989). In other words, with regards to the regime of pairing and the various (self-relational) projects it makes available as well as the constitutive power relations its set up, the truth being sought and consumed is one that functions to mould a particular kind of couple experience, lifestyle and ‘self’ through which we, our ‘connections’, our ‘freedoms’, and our ‘choices’ are effectively governed.

Significant to this analysis is that the idealised self-relational authenticities and containments being announced, confirmed and necessarily adhered to have no timeless and coherent essence. Such authenticities do not exist in ‘pure forms’ merely awaiting exposure and a ‘proper’ relation to them. As Foucault suggests in the header quote to this chapter, the basis

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5 See also Marxist and feminist analyses of the family and marriage as supports for capitalism through the reproduction of the compliant worker and appropriation of women’s unpaid domestic labour that maintains workers (e.g. Atkinson, 1974; Pateman, 1988; Robinson, 1997; cf. Kerfoot and Knights, 1994).
Chapter Four

of our present knowledge is that it has no timeless or metaphysical essence other than one fabricated in “piecemeal fashion from alien forms” (Foucault, 1971: 78). Those various practices that are enacted, and the predominant values that are prioritised in the harnessing of Truth as sketched in this chapter bear no relation to ‘truth’ in an empiricist sense but are fabrications that emerge from relative grids of meanings, semantic collusions and discontinuities and from the contingent pathways of the words that give them form and make them intelligible. For example we would not understand ‘bonded’, ‘close’, ‘sexual’ or ‘intimate’ relationships in ways that we do without the specific semantic and discursive apparatus through which these know-hows are activated and without the occurrence of their histories of shifting meanings as these have been outlined here. How such concepts are made intelligible involves a linguistic process (which from a post-structuralist perspective is indeed a discursive process) of mixing significations, adapting denotations of material objects and physical actions to qualify emotions, characterise people, and bring them ‘together’; of applying meanings to alien contexts, and of elevating some meanings while lessening others. These are all formative elements in the constructive process of semantic generalisations and specialisations that are never fixed but are continually adapted in accordance with a reigning system (ethos) of government and its political-economic organisations of society and individuals.

By the various etymologies and semantic associations here analysed, I have aimed to illustrate something of the productive lexical complex that underwrites the socio-political virtues of containment, authenticity, stability, constancy and a pleasure of moderation: a socially induced semantic complex that organises the ‘normal’ (and thereby also the ‘abnormal’) couple experience and those involved while delimiting other and yet unforseen possibilities. This chartering of the semantic history of our discursive present, though of course incomplete, allows for a more cogent analysis of the current couple-narrative and its various technologies as turned to next in a discursive analysis of the domain in question. In the discourse analysis that follows many of the principles, intelligibilities and disciplines sketched in this chapter are further explicated and illustrated while other aspects of the domain are also chartered. So in subsequent chapters the story told so far is both consolidated and extended.
CHAPTER FIVE

Discourse Analysis I

(Re)producing couple containment

“The entrance into this place I made to be not by a door, but by a short ladder to go over the top; which ladder, when I was in, I lifted over after me, and so I was completely fenced in and fortified, as I thought, from all the world, and consequently slept secure in the night, which otherwise I could not have done; though as it appeared afterwards, there was no need of all this caution from the enemies that I apprehended danger from.”

Daniel Defoe (‘Robinson Crusoe’)

“The one-to-one relationship, whether it is realised through monogamy or within other forms of marriage, fulfils man’s profoundly human needs – those developmental and psychological needs for intimacy, trust, affection, affiliation and the validation of experience. It need not be permanent, exclusive or dependent, but the relationship of two people to each other allows a closeness and psychological intimacy that no other kind of relationship offers.”

George O’Neill and Nena O’Neill (1972: 24)

5.1 Introduction

Following Study One’s etymological exploration of some of the key semantic conditions upon which the present discursive practices of coupledom have come to be made both possible and intelligible, this and the following two chapters explore aspects of the present system of statements by which the couple matrix is currently (re)produced. This first part of Study Two picks up from an analytic point made in the previous chapter concerning the eighteenth century semantic delineations of spatialised individuals and emotional connections. This spatialisation of people and emotions can be seen as being tied to a ‘substance ontology’ (Stenner, 1999) – that is, a way of being and thinking that increasingly compartmentalised and made containable the various ‘essences’ being ascribed to these emergent spaces with the effect of making these ‘essences’ constant, certain, predictable and thus controllable in their containments. The purpose of this chapter, then, is to deconstruct the socio-historically embedded assumptions concerning the discursive practice of dyadic
containment as an index of self-relational authenticity and truth in both monogamous and non-monogamous couple relationships (of same and opposite sex). What follows is an enquiry into the discursive properties, technologies, and productive power of a centralised and exclusive ‘dyad’ as constructed by people when talking about their relationships. To reinterpret the exclusivity and authority of dyadic containment as discursive phenomena in this way is to radically oppose the psychologisation of the practice/quality as inescapably human.

In this chapter it is argued that the discursive practice of a privatised and privileged couple exclusivity is made intelligible, moralised, and authorised through a series of enabling metaphoric dichotomies. The dichotomies and hierarchical valuations of inside-outside, presence-absence, order-chaos, and depth-superficiality are shown to create figurative and literal (contravening and converging) spaces that serve to produce particular knowledges and power effects in relation to how both monogamous and non-monogamous relationships and identities can be understood and experienced. Attending to ways in which sexually non-monogamous participants variously formulate the practice of couple-containment is useful as a means of navigating ‘monogamous’ dyadic conventions further given that constructions and justifications of non-monogamy can involve reproductions of conventional dyadic containment, as will be illustrated.

As discussed below, by way of the pervasive conceptual metaphor of ‘home’ and all this signifies, the dyadic model of coupledom is ascribed an exclusive privilege that serves to regulate the couple experience as a form of (en)closed containment. This metaphorically constituted couple-containment is problematised here as a fundamental power-knowledge of the couple relationship in both ‘conventional’ and ‘alternative’ manifestations of romantic pairing. So, then, the line of analytic argument in this chapter proceeds by deconstructing the production and regulation of dyadic containment as apparent in constructions of the couple ‘home’ and then moves to suggest this regulation of containment as being problematically reproduced in ‘alternative’ relationships.
5.2 Building houses and living metaphor

In his discussion of the role of metaphor in the history of psychology and the framing of its theory, Leary (1990) defines metaphor as the “giving to one thing a name or description that belongs by convention to something else” (ibid: 4), and that not just objects, but also qualities, events, experiences, psychological and everyday knowledges are all ‘metaphorised’ phenomenon (cf. Lakoff and Johnson, 1980; Danziger, 1990b). Influential exemplars of the metaphoric production of psychological knowledge are the ‘unconscious’ of Freudian theory and the computer motif of cognitive psychology. Potter and Wetherell (1987) similarly refer to the constructive function of metaphor in their discussion of ‘interpretive repertoires’ as a recurring “lexicon or register of terms and metaphors drawn upon to characterize and evaluate actions and events” (ibid.: 138). In such repertoires metaphor and other figures of speech (tropes) function as ‘rhetorical devices’ and play a key role in the construction of reality with structural and architectural imagery (along with images of streams and water) said to be among the most pervasive in psychological discourse and everyday talk (Potter and Wetherell, 1987). Leary, however, argues for the primacy of metaphor over other rhetorical devices in that “metaphor is not simply one among many figures of speech and thought but…can reasonably be considered to be the primary figure of speech” (Leary, 1990: 4). For Derrida (1978) metaphor illustrates the non-presence of ‘real’ meaning (see below) and for Nietzsche “it really does seem...as if things themselves approached and offered themselves as metaphors” (Nietzsche, 1883: 23).

Using both qualitative and quantitative methodologies, psychological research has explored the metaphorical constructions of romantic partnership particularly in terms of the recurrent imagery people use to describe (heterosexual) relationship development. For example, people’s talk of relationship development has been described as involving the metaphoric imagery of relationships as machine, investment, and organism (Katriel and Philipsen, 1981); as journey, container, and fairy-tale (Owen, 1990); or as clustering around the themes of work-exchange, journey-organism, and force-danger (Baxter, 1992). In this body of research it is again asserted that “metaphors constitute a vivid and powerful lens by which to make sense of the human experience” (ibid.: 253), with Baxter extending the function of metaphor as a sense-making lens to being the very organising frameworks by which people construct versions of social reality. As organisational frameworks, ‘conceptual metaphors’ (Lakoff and
Johnson, 1980) produce concepts and objects, reify analogy, and constitute experience with the ‘organising logics’ of metaphor, serving as “implicit guidelines for relationship parties in how they should conduct their relational lives” (Baxter, 1992: 267).

As evident in chapter four’s semantic analysis of conceptual metaphors such as ‘bondedness’ and ‘closeness’, metaphoric figures of speech work to powerfully organise the dominant logics of thought about couples. I begin the discursive analysis of this chapter by highlighting the constructions of the couple relationship as being like a house and home that were pervasive in participants’ accounts - metaphoric analogies that are highly constitutive in ascribing a certain kind of conceptual reality to the domain in question. According to Baxter’s (1992) analysis of the metaphoric construction of relationship development, men and women do not significantly differ in the type or frequency of root metaphors utilised in relationship talk. However, in relation to the following analyses of the metaphors of ‘house’ and ‘home’, it can be suggested that the capitalist-patriarchal division of labour has given rise to very gendered constructions of couple relationships (Wetherell, 1995; Dryden, 1999; Maushart, 2001) in that the analogy of relationships as ‘houses’ and physical structures is drawn on more frequently (but not exclusively) by the male participants of this research as masculinised builders and protectors, while the analogy of ‘home’ is utilised more often by female participants constituted as the stereotypical home-maker.

Dominic [H/M] 1: {A relationship is} 2 shared meaning together as a couple. I’ve used the word ‘cement’ before and I’ve used the word ‘glue’ and it’s kind of like

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1 Further to gender (evident in the pseudonyms), classifications of participant’s self-identified ‘sexuality’ and relationship ‘type’ accompany each extract. Indicating these three subject positions may be useful for a reader’s own interpretation of the data. However, it is again emphasised that categories of ‘sexuality’ and relationship ‘type’ are not to be taken as rigid as some participants identifying as heterosexual, for example, at the time of interview were experimenting with bisexuality as a function of non-monogamous practice. Furthermore, one participant’s understanding of ‘monogamy’ or ‘non-monogamy’ is not necessarily the same as another’s or even consistent within the one interview. Categories indicated are those that participants were comfortable with at the time of interview but this is not to overshadow the fluctuation and flexibility taking place.

Category codes are as follows: H = heterosexual; L = lesbian; G = gay; B = bisexual; M = a sexually monogamous relationship; NM1 = a sexually non-monogamous relationship that does not involve ‘secondary’ or ancillary relationships outside of the ‘primary’ relationship; NM2 = a sexually non-monogamous relationship that can/does involve secondary relationships outside of the primary relationship; ND = a non-dyadic relationship or a participant with previous experience of this.

2 See page iv for explanation of the transcription symbols used.
building a house where you start stacking bricks and cementing them together and so forth.

Clare [H/NM2]: We are partners building something together and it’s that that no one else can replace.

Barry [G/NM1/ND]: [...] You want to build a relationship between yourself and that person. Um, to work at it. And explore it, and build it, and grow it.

These extracts liken the establishment of a couple relationship to the act of building with Dominic specifying this as ‘building a house’ – a metaphoric analogy made possible since the seventeenth century when European contracted marriages and nuclear families came to be increasingly separated from the public sphere and privatised in houses and homes in physical, socio-economic and affective terms (Stone, 1977; De Swann, 1990). In Dominic’s use of the ‘house’ analogy, the couple relationship is constructed as a fortified structure that is established by ‘stacking bricks and cementing them together’. This is a relationship that requires work, craftsmanship, durable materials cemented together and sturdy components. As ‘houses’ one can begin to talk of entering and existing relationships, of being in them, sheltered by them or as being trapped in them, of building and strengthening them, and as necessarily maintaining and working on them. Significantly, one can begin to talk about, conceptualise and theorise couple relationships as solid architectural structures that are ideally stable, fixed, immobile and permanent and that require solid foundations and proper maintenance.

In the next extract this architectural symbolism can be seen as serving to construct the couple relationship as a self-sufficient, self-contained structure or space surrounded by an ‘outside’ field into which one would only venture if one’s house or relationship is inadequate in some way.

Ricky [G/M]: And I can understand how and why some people might be motivated to look outside of their relationships in order fulfil an element of um (...) an element of need that they don’t consider their relationship at that particular point in time to be providing.

In this structural and spatial organisation of a contained (monogamous) relationship as ideally all-providing and all-fulfilling, looking ‘outside’ to an external (public) realm is made
to signify relationship lack and insufficiency with the very ability to ‘look outside’ of a relationship from the position of being ‘inside’ it being a metaphorical condition. Like functional houses, relationships should ‘ideally’ provide all the essentials for a satisfied and fulfilled living with remaining inside and a constant inward-looking representative of adequate function and satisfaction. As I go on to explore, in this metaphoric production and channelling of experience, one that delineates, brackets off and qualifies coupledom as a specific domain, various relations of power and mechanisms of control are made operable. Acknowledging the “metaphoricity of psychological concepts and terms” (Leary, 1990: 19) and their impact on everyday thought and practice means that “we should pause and reflect on the nature and consequences of these metaphors” (ibid.: 21) and not mistake metaphoric constructions for unambiguous conceptual foundations.

In the following quotes a house/home metaphor is again drawn on to signify the ‘ideal’ stability and strength of a relationship.

*Joe [H/M]*: Trust, I think that’s one of the cornerstones of relationships, trust.

*Dominic [H/M]:* [...] we can talk about the four pillars {of relationships} which might be trust, love, ar commitment and one other thing. I don’t know what the fourth pillar is.

*Ken [H/M]*: I think I’ve already said that um, you know, it {monogamy} creates a balance I guess, and a fairness. An evenness. Um, just creates the relationship. Makes it strong.

Here one significant effect of the metaphoric and metonymic construction of (monogamous) relationships as houses and physical structures is the reification and valuation of culturally produced relationship practices as crucial ‘cornerstones’ and ‘pillars’. In that the semantic solidification of couple relationships produces a need for stabilising them upon firm foundations and solid ground, trust, love, commitment and monogamy are talked about as being crucial to establish, strengthen and hold up the fabric(ation) of a relationship. In order to fulfil a metaphorised need for relational stability, these ‘cornerstones’, ‘pillars’ and ‘bricks’ take on essentialised qualities of their own and are ascribed ‘proper’ function, absolute value, and actual purpose. Such relational components are construed, deployed, and valorised as necessary foundations and supports against the enabling construction of
relationships as architectural structures that are to be built and stabilised, or as segmented spaces that are to be partitioned off. As suggested, “there is no absolute chasm between metaphorical and literal language and thought” (Leary, 1990: 19; cf. Nietzsche, 1887a, and Derrida, 1976). Metaphors have a significant constitutive impact on the design and practices of the couple domain, functioning as the lexical channels for knowledge, experience and ostensible truth.

Metamorphised as a ‘house’ the couple relationship is effectively reified and objectified as a locatable and fortified space and made visible as an identifiable and ideally stable structure that is to be skilfully and properly established using the right bricks and mortar. Moreover, as houses even loosely resemble one another in sharing a common function, and so can be readily identified as a ‘house’ and not as something else (a tent or caravan, for example), so too do couple relationships share a common resemblance to each other (as house-like) so as to be knowable and liveable as one type of ‘relationship’ as opposed to the not-relationships of tents. By the ‘building’ of relationships that come to resemble each other according to a conventional and pre-fabricated architectural design, the couple-house and its occupants are brought into regulated and regulating view. And in this residential planning and design of the couple domain the psy-disciplines are employed as foremost architects, designing various pillars for relationship stabilisation and packaging various bricks, glues and cements for the sturdy erection and proper maintenance of these structures. Typical of the regulatory and normalising function of the ‘economy of visibility’, as Foucault (1977a) theorises it (see chapters four and seven), in the couple domain the operation of disciplinary power is masked by the fact that in building ‘houses’ the couple is made to assume full and independent responsibility for them, all the while reproducing and conforming to the culturally sanctioned and psychologically confirmed architectural style. Thus couple relationships and those who dwell in its normalised structure are effectively governed in and by this metaphoric production of houses, builders and home-makers where given the right kind of building skills, workmanship and management programs partnerships can be made stable, permanent and self-sufficient. The symbolism of the couple domain, and the power of this, is even more acute as relational ‘houses’ are furnished with the qualities, values, and comforts of ‘home’.
5.3 No place like home

“Into this fence or fortress, with infinite labor, I carried all my riches, all my provisions, ammunitions and stores …” (Daniel Defoe, ‘Robinson Crusoe’)

Historical and sociological accounts of family, marriage, and emotion have specified the increasing emphasis on personal and relational privacy and the privileging of this as the most acute change in the lifestyles and relationships of the bourgeoisie during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (e.g. Stone, 1977; Stearns and Stearns, 1988; MacFarlane, 1987; Cancian, 1987; De Swaan, 1990). By the late seventeenth century, and increasingly into the nineteenth, there is said to have been a strong socio-economic emphasis on boundaries around the nuclear family ‘unit’ accompanied by the rising tide of (self-contained) individualism and an increase of emotional ‘bonding’ particularly with regard to the conjugal relationship (Stone, 1977). As Williams (1976) suggests in his etymological analysis of various socio-cultural concepts, from the late sixteenth century onwards, and accompanying the public/private divide as well as changes in meanings of the ‘individual’ and ‘family’, there was an increasing synoptic association between the ideas of ‘privacy’ and ‘privilege’. Referring to shifts in meanings of ‘private’ and ‘exclusive’, Williams contrasts the fourteenth century senses of these words as denoting a withdrawal from public life and as being associated with deprivation (mainly with regards to religious orders) to the sixteenth century senses of ‘secret’ and ‘concealed’ wherein limited access to or minimum participation in public life was positively construed as an advantage, as illustrated by positive connotations of words such as ‘independence’ and ‘intimacy’. So the earlier senses of ‘exclusivity’ and ‘privacy’ as being about deprivation had during the course of the seventeenth century come to assimilate positive meanings and beneficial values. In its positive sense, the notion of ‘privacy’, suggests Williams (1976: 204), “is a testimony to a bourgeois view of life – the privilege of seclusion and protection from others (i.e. the public), a lack of accountability to ‘them’ and of related gains in closeness and comfort.”

As seen in chapter four, consistent with this privileging of exclusivity and privacy is the developing senses of relational ‘closeness’ that by the eighteenth century had come to denote a positively viewed private and contained space of physical and emotional exclusivity – a space made observable and liveable by concurrent developments of the ‘self-contained’ individual (see Sampson, 1977, 1989; Hirst and Woolley, 1982). In line with a positively
construed ‘privacy’ and ‘exclusivity’, particularly with regards to the emerging ‘at home’ couple and family, the concept of ‘home’ from the eighteenth century took on a sense of privileged exclusivity as a site offering protection, security, and comfort (De Swann, 1990). And so it is that when participants talk about their partnerships, the conceptual metaphor and symbolic archetype of ‘home’ is commonly deployed to express the privilege of couple exclusivity as a private, comfortable, secure, and contained space or shelter.

_Elizabeth [L/M]:_ But there was something about Sophia that I felt I was at home with. I was at home. I was home. I'd come home. / MF: mm mm / And that’s the best way I can explain it.

_Adam [G/M]:_ If you’ve got the strength in your relationship no matter what comes along um, you will come back to your principle relationship for your home values, your comfort factors. All those things that make you feel like life is worth living. / MF: mm mm / And that’s probably what it is. Where do you go to be enjoying life? / MF: mm / That to me is where I’d rather be.

_Rebecca [L/M]:_ But I think a relationship, who you come home to in the evenings, that you know is going to sit there so you can tell them all about what you’ve been doing, is really important. Yeah, a sort of basis for security and comfort to make sure that other things in your life work.

For these participants, ‘home’ is where a relationship is and a relationship, in turn, is ‘home’. So pervasive is the root metaphor of ‘home’ in the construction of couple relationships that Elizabeth cannot otherwise, or better, explain how she feels about her relationship with Sophia. As Baxter (1992: 254-5) notes, “metaphors afford a compactness and vividness of expression difficult to match through other linguistic forms.” And in its compactness and vividness, the metaphor of ‘home’ acts as a useful means for figuring oneself and another, and for putting the two together (Barthes, 1977). In this group of extracts, having or being in a relationship enables one to metaphorically and literally go home, be and feel at home, experience a partner as home, retreat into home values, and generally enjoy a workable and worthwhile life as a consequence.

In these three quotations there is a strong sense of the subject of attachment theory, as Bowlby conceived it, and its figurative notions of the ‘safe havens’ and ‘secure bases’ of ‘affectional bonds’ (see chapter two). In the metaphoric thinking of Bowlby (a characteristic of psychoanalysis but not unique to it) and in his reifying use of the ‘home/haven’ metaphor
in particular, attachment theory is a vivid example of how metaphor guides psychological theory and its ‘objective’ claims to the extent that metaphors are confused with ‘reality’ (Nietzsche, 1887a; Derrida, 1978; Leary, 1990). That these participant’s talk of returning home to a secure, haven-like base of comfort and shelter and preferring to be there as opposed to anywhere else is not the effect of an unambiguous human desire but a significant function of the developing meaning and privilege of ‘home’ to signify the physical and emotional quality of couple relationships.

Given that the discursive deployment of ‘home’ by couples, along with its inference of a privileged privacy, is significantly tied to the dichotomisation of the private and public realms that was crucial to patriarchal capitalism and liberal political thought well into the nineteenth century in terms of the production of a fixed labour force, the exploitation of women as unpaid domestic labour, and compensation to men for the alienating nature of work (Rose, 1989), the construct and value of an exclusive (‘homey’) privacy and its impact on what it means to be ‘coupled’ can be seen as being the result of “an ideology that disguises the oppressive relations within the intimate sphere” (ibid.: 126). Thus the ‘home values’ of coupledom are to be understood as part of a wider socio-political project according to which these values have come to be installed in our homes, relationships, and psychologies. That a couple relationship is where Adam goes to know and enjoy a worthwhile life can be viewed as the effect of this productive metaphorical installation wherein private matters and spaces are produced, privileged and psychologised as being necessary for an ideologically inaugurated ‘good life’, one that since classical Greek philosophy has been deemed ‘good’ insofar as the politically useful is joined to the psychologically agreeable (see chapter one and Foucault, 1986, 1986) and in which power relations, particularly gender power relations, are consequently obscured (Atkinson, 1974; Robinson, 1997).

The ‘home values’ of coupledom - its exclusive privacies, comforts, intimacies, securities and stabilising (gendered) performances – are, then, to be re-appraised as the conceptual and discursive mainstays of politico-patriarchal ideology. Those couple values being expressed in the above excerpts are not endogenous to the couple-experience but are tied to particular ideological principles which are perpetuated by (and as) figures of metaphoric speech. That is, the constructed goodness, qualities and benefits of romantic ‘at home’ partnership, such as these participants articulate them, are to be reinterpreted as politically infused and
metaphorically channelled fictions that come to function as truth (Foucault, 1977e). And these psychologised values, like the idealised ‘stability’ of couple houses, can be viewed as fictions because they take on meaning and association not via any connection to fact or to how things ‘actually’ are but because they are already given meaning and value in the hegemonic metaphorical framing of the couple domain. The conceptual metaphors that give specific forms to the discursive practices, qualities, and values of couple relationships function as conduits of productive power relations and therefore of a regulating discipline that warrants and enforces a particular relational paradigm and set of rationales for dyadic emotion, conduct, and experience that under a blanket of privatisation are made to exist as individual desire and choice and as favourable forms of personal security (Rose, 1989; 1999).

So far I have been suggesting that the culturally available conceptual metaphors of ‘house’ and ‘home’ serve as crucial and constitutive points of reference for what occurs within couple relationships, how they are ‘ideally’ experienced (as exclusive, comfortable, secure and safe) and what they ‘ideally’ represent (strength, protection, seclusion and privilege). Not only do the married or co-habiting couple exist at home, they are regulated precisely because they are ‘at home’ in a particular, clearly marked out space/structure with all the shared socio-cultural understandings of what it means to be there. In the next section I explore further the particular potency of the construction of couple relationships as ‘houses/homes’ in terms of an externality that this spatialisation simultaneously codes and juxtaposes itself to and by which the ‘inside’ effectively consolidates its privileged exclusive status. And this, as will be illustrated, has significant impact on what it means to be ‘contained’ in and by a relationship - a containment that is no less acute in constructions of non-monogamous relationships than it is in constructions of monogamy, albeit it variously configured across these relational contexts (see sections 5.6 and 5.7).

5.4 The topography of containment

I have suggested that the ‘privilege’ of couple closure/exclusivity is historically and discursively aligned with a privileged sense of ‘home’, an association that I will highlight as significantly prioritising a positively construed containment of ‘dyadic essence’ that while fixed and static (like the house/home that metaphorically circumscribes it) is also in need of continual work so as to prevent change and maintain the relationship. And this sense of an
objectified and regulatory containment of dyadic essence that is apparent in constructions of sexual monogamy can be seen as providing the conceptual and discursive conditions for the resistances of sexual/emotional non-monogamy. One purpose to this section, then, is to deconstruct ‘monogamy’ as not only and always sexual fidelity as it is typically understood in Psychology where a simplistic and reductionist monogamous/non-monogamous divide is assumed. Picking up on Foucault’s point that (regarding the hermeneutics of the self) there are many dimensions to the content and austerity of fidelity, it is argued that the “essence of fidelity is not only found in the act of sexual faithfulness itself”, or in the moral prohibitions enforcing it, but also in the ‘mastery of desires’ (Foucault, 1984, 1985) enacted by the self-regulating ethical subject (chapter four) - a mastery of desires that is predicated on and works to continually reaffirm the emergent containments of a ‘substance ontology’ (Stenner, 1999) or ‘metaphysics of containment’ (Nietzsche, 1887a; Butler, 1990).

In the following two extracts, the metaphoric ‘private’ spaces, enclosed structures, and the emotional/physical containments of the couple domain are said to all be confirmed in and by the practice of sexual monogamy.

Tricia [H/M]: … it {sexual monogamy} creates a bit of a, a unity and a bond. And it’s us versus the world. And special ’cause you know you’re sharing something only with that person and visa versa.

Geraldine [H/M]: {In sexual monogamy} you want to share an intimate space with your partner and you don’t want anyone else to come inside. / MF: mm mm / That’s monogamy.

Tricia and Geraldine construct sexual monogamy as an exclusive connection and sharing between two partners. Monogamy here takes the form of an intimate, homely, and bonded dyadic sharing that is ‘special’ in its exclusiveness because it occurs ‘inside’, is contained there, and remains closed off to anyone else in a play of ‘us versus the world’. In depictions of an ‘inside’ and a ‘united’ front of ‘us versus them’, antagonistic notions of ‘public’ and ‘private’ are drawn on to warrant and privilege sexual and emotional fidelity or containment. While Tricia draws on the connections of ‘unity’ and ‘bond’ to signify the autonomous and non-divisible dyadic essence, Geraldine delineates exclusivity as an ‘intimate space’ that is similarly exclusive in character. As such the same privilege is marked by closing off the ‘inside’ of her couple space, or home, to others. Despite drawing on different linguistic
resources to locate their relationship and ascribe it its exclusive quality, both metaphoric deployments clearly allude to an oppositionalised ‘outside’ that is to be excluded either by way of a somewhat aggressive united front or by a more passive seclusion. On this basis of dichotomised territories anything less than total monogamy is constituted as misdirected desire and knowledge. That is, it transgresses the home boundary where things should be in their place (cf. Mary Douglas’, 1966, account of ‘soil’ in the field becoming ‘dirt’ in the house). In these examples sexual monogamy works as the action or policy that keeps the ‘inside’ ordered and as that which guards the already circumscribed closure of ‘closeness’, ‘unity’ and ‘bond’.

Now these private-public, inside-outside, inclusive-exclusive hierarchical binaries not only mark out separate spaces and lay down metaphorical and literal boundaries around the secluded and united dyad of private privilege, they also produce particular psychological effects in the enablement of a ‘monogamous identity’. In Tricia’s quote, the psychology of containment is manifest as a subjective knowing of exclusive sharing while in Geraldine’s quote it manifests as the desire for this. Psychologically ‘knowing’ and/or ‘desiring’ the kind of privilege being described reifies the privilege further in that the subject positioned in this bounded space is able to ‘know’ and ‘want’ the (already ignited and coded) experience as her own; as being a function of her own mind, action and desire. Furthermore, in this figurative discursive field and its interplay of constitutive polarities, Tricia and Geraldine are constructing themselves as ethical subjects who are ideally able to master this agonistic field of opposing forces (Foucault, 1985). The ‘knowledge’ and ‘desire’ spoken of can, therefore, be interpreted as deliberate acts in a kind of ethical self-relational mastery in which desire for sexual or other relationships outside the couple ‘home’ is quashed or mastered. In her combative ‘us versus the world’ Tricia almost champions the mastery afforded by her privileged and pleasurable knowledge. Geraldine’s is an ethical self-mastery gained by a desire that is juxtaposed to (and overcomes) what she doesn’t want. What can be seen as being demonstrated, then, is Foucault’s (1985) point that a broadly conceived ‘fidelity’ is to be found not only in the observance of sexual interdictions but in an ethical mastery of (the knowing and desiring) self striving for a ‘proper’ relation to herself and the polarised inside/outside worlds.
In both of these extracts a monogamously contained sharing and ‘identity’ is made intelligible by what is held within the enclosed, private space and by what is excluded and not shared. These self-contained subjects have to deal with the threat of ‘otherness’ within themselves (Lacan, 1949) and from the ‘outside’ so as to maintain both a consciousness of this subjectivity and the privileged status of their relationships. As referred to in chapter four, the concept of ‘close’ constructs a closure that presumes an outside space; a dichotomised presence which is assumed to be ideally absent and so must be blocked off. The point here is that romantic and moral constructions of relationships as privately exclusive, closed, and contained (Wetherell, 1995) simultaneously construct an external field (or non-containment) that is, at least implicitly, negatively depicted as a threatening and opposing force, space or influence. The private couple domain is afforded its particular moral status and authority in accordance with the public realm that it opposes itself to, an opposition that is conditional on the emergent seventeenth century ontology that “interiorises and contains meaning and uniqueness” (Brittain, cited in Kitzinger, 1989: 182; italics added).

Derrida’s concept of differance is a useful tool for deconstructing the series of conceptual juxtapositions that enable the privileged signification and status of coupledom. According to Derrida’s (1976, 1978) challenge to the logic of binary opposition and hierarchy, the meaning of any term, object or ‘identity’ is discoverable in its presumed opposite. That is, each term contains both itself and its other: A is both A and not A. As such, Derrida’s is a deconstructive logic of both/and as opposed to the structuralist and dualistic logic of either/or. Extending this principle, Derrida argues that presence is always and already inhabited by absence such that the apparent privileged ‘presence’ (of containment, monogamy, order, constancy, for example) itself becomes suspect in that it always and already assumes, and is penetrated by, its alleged absence or binary other (non-containment, non-monogamy, chaos, uncertainty). In these terms that which is ‘present’ is always and already parasitically reliant on that which is assumed to be ‘absent’, denied or marginalised (Derrida, 1978). Thus for Derrida there are no things, forces, natural essences, or intrinsic meanings but only always differences and distinctions wherein the privileging of one term of a dualism over the other (‘inside’ over ‘outside’, for example) is what inscribes both with relative meaning and value. Thus the meaning and value of the ‘inside’ of the couple home is relative to the ‘outside’ it presumes and marginalises and in this discursive difference a supposed ‘essence’ of each is made possible and intelligible as an illusion of metaphoric language (ibid.).
In his anti-humanist, post-structuralist philosophy, Deleuze (Deleuze and Parnet, 1987; see also Deleuze and Guattari, 1972, 1980) similarly theorises knowledge and experience as constituted in and by the discursive ‘binary machine’ that involves geometric and geographical metaphors, and a ‘disjunctive’ as opposed to a ‘connective’ synthesis. For Deleuze this is a machine for over-coding (that is, for setting flows apart, detaching elements from a chain), and for organising dominant utterances and establishing social order, knowledge, conformist actions and feelings. In that particular ‘segments’, binary codes or connective syntheses prevail over others the binary machine is a matrix of power as it functions to constitute conventional self-relational ‘truths’ while clouding over ‘zones of unpredictability’ and further possibility (see also Butler, 1990; Grosz, 1994; Potts, 2001). Like Derrida, Deleuze regards the borders and frontiers of dualisms (male-female, hetero-homo, reality-fantasy, connection-disconnection, for example) as not marking ‘actual’ oppositions but as producing a discursive mirage of fixed, neatly segmented, ordered and organised realities. There are, argue Deleuze and Guattari (1977), no contained subjects, structures or substances, but a geometrical and abstract drawing of an organised ‘reality’ for the illusion of constancy, certainty, containment and authenticity. In these terms, the ontological and relatively static ‘realities’ of the couple domain and its occupants are the productions and regulations of a disciplinary binary logic. Hence it becomes necessary to question the taken-for-granted realities of ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ spaces that the rhetoric of coupledom draws up and to deconstruct the centralised ‘essence’ of dyadic containment as a discursive fiction.

In the following extract the power of the binary law of structuralism is further illustrated.

*Geraldine [H/M]:* Our intimate space for the moment is just me and him. I'm scared because it's such a precious space and it's so easy. Um, and I'm scared that by opening a little door we might not um, we might not be able to face, not able to face, but maybe our relationship is not strong enough.

Here the subject of couple containment (already viewing and filtering the outside world from the ontological position of a contained ‘selfhood’) talks about herself as comfortable and secure in the home or inside space of her intimate monogamous relationship and as being scared about ‘opening a little door’ that may disrupt the ‘precious’ and ‘easy’ enclosure as constructed. Applying a post-structuralist critique of duality, however, this private, precious, and easy containment is devoid of any inherent strength, property or quality. Geraldine is
able to qualify her objectified and centralised space as ‘precious’ only insofar as it simultaneously assumes a discursive and conceptual juxtaposition to (and produces a psychologised fear of) an unknown and scary externality that is potentially destructive and threatening to the couple. Geraldine’s construction of an enclosed comfort and security, and the value afforded it, is clearly relative to what is assumed to oppose it. Opening a little door would expose an ‘outside’ that would have to be ‘faced’ (as Geraldine begins to say) and confronted. In this dichotomisation of inside-outside, then, the meaning and signification of one term is simultaneously present in the other. Two kinds of presences co-exist, always and already inhabiting and signifying each other. A significant function of this inside-outside dichotomy and the fact that one term is constitutive of the other, is that coupled subjects are continually positioned inside the metaphoric (and literal) home wherein their desires, fears and therefore also their very conduct and mobility are regulated and normalised. As such the reifications produced by the dichotomy have very clear power effects.

This and other associated dualisms (private-public, inclusion-exclusion, containment-seepage) do not, as is frequently suggested, exist as ‘facts’ or signify ‘real’ oppositions. Rather power is generated by the setting up of conceptual oppositions that are assumed to be real and that are coded in particular ways in a discursively constituted hierarchy of difference between the orderings and containments of ‘presence’ and the chaos of ‘absence’. Given that a containment made to be ‘present’ in the ‘inside’ of couple spaces and structures always and already refers to its ‘absent’ opposite, there cannot be drawn any neat line of meaningful opposition between what it is to be self-relationally contained or not, or ‘monogamous’ or not. The inside and outside no longer have any (‘real’) meaning independent of each other (Derrida, 1976; Deleuze and Guattari, 1977; Butler, 1990) yet the illusion that they have works to constitute and regulate people and relationships in very specific and ‘real’ ways as they are totalised and locked-in to ‘essence’ and ‘truth’ by a pervasive binary law.

This non-divisibility of inside-outside, presence-absence and similar dualisms (as highlighted below) is equally demonstrated in constructions of a ‘non-monogamy’ that is also thoroughly inhabited by a presence of ‘monogamy’ in the sense of dyadic emotional containment. So, then, the line of analytic argument which has so far concerned the monogamous production and regulation of a dyadic essence or specialness that is ‘ideally’ contained in space, structure
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and substance now develops to suggest this regulatory containment as being problematically reproduced, indeed intensified, in ‘open’, non-monogamous relationships.

Brian is a gay man in a sexually non-monogamous relationship that he characterises as emotionally monogamous (i.e. a non-monogamous relationship that does not allow for ‘secondary’ or ancillary relationships = NM1). Along with two other men, Barry is involved in a three-way relationship (ND = non-dyadic) that he also characterises as emotionally monogamous.

Brian [G/NM1]: In my schooling and everything, what we're doing is not monogamy / MF: mm / You know? The pure definition of the word it just doesn't fit so I can't really use that word. We have an intimate bond that is not shared with everyone else and no one else can get into that, into that field sort of thing.

Barry [G/NM1/ND]: Now the fact that my relationship’s got two other men in our case, as well as myself, I don’t think in my mind changes the paradigm of what a monogamous relationship is about. Um, it's still a matter of it’s within the boundaries of the chosen.

Brian cannot identify his relationship as ‘monogamous’ because the ‘pure (i.e. sexual) definition’ of the word as culturally determined is not seen to be appropriate to it. Nevertheless, he goes on to specify an ‘intimate bond’ that is shared exclusivity in a relational ‘field’ that is at once emotionally contained and closed off to outsiders. The ‘everyone else’ that Brian and his partner have sex with are talked about as not sharing or being able to ‘get into’ the kind of dyadic emotional monogamy between himself and his partner that Brian is constructing and privileging. And he codes this emotional containment along the same lines that Geraldine and Tricia construct their emotional and sexual containment - as a privileged exclusivity that maintains its status by remaining closed off to the ‘outside’ (public) world. To confirm his ‘monogamy’ Brian draws on the metaphors of both intimate connection (‘bond’) and space (‘field’). In doing so he thus constitutes a private and privileged exclusivity which is then further affirmed, and hence authorised, by the extreme case formulation of the excluded ‘everyone else’ (see Pomerantz, 1986).

Similar to Brian, Barry articulates a broader paradigm of ‘monogamy’ as applicable to his relationship not because sexual relations are confined to it but because the paradigmatic practice provides a clear ‘boundary’ within which the ‘chosen’ are contained, the ‘outside’
excluded, and the arrangement therefore coded and made intelligible as a ‘relationship’. In his reference to himself and his partners as the ‘chosen’, Barry is attaching a highly selective and elitist, almost sacred privilege to relational containment. Like Brian’s double confirmation of a contained exclusivity as a way of leaving no doubt as to the character and status his relationship, Barry’s emphasis of contained exclusivity can similarly be seen as working to heavily confirm the privileged status and ‘worth’ of his relationship. With these kinds of (re)confirmations what is being compounded and (re)produced is a conformity to the normalising and regulatory construction of couple-containment by way of an adapted ‘monogamy’; a privileging of containment that in its (re)deployment in sexually non-monogamous relationships works to similarly mark the ‘authenticity’ and ‘truth’ – the ‘realness’ - of a relationship’s ‘structure’ and ‘substance’.

Of significance, then, is that the marking of ‘authenticity’ across relationship ‘types’ consistently hinges on the affirmation of a dyadic ‘essence’ that is necessarily bound and contained if it is to be thought of, experienced and validated as being somehow ‘present’, ‘real’ and ‘true’. In deploying and reconfirming the structuralist ideology of containment (Derrida, 1976; Deleuze and Guattari, 1977) as a mark of self-relational ‘truth’ in this way, the ‘unconventional’ and ‘alternative’ relationship and subjectivity are effectively normalised in and by the culturally available technology of truth that warrants an ‘authentic realness’ and that makes it necessary for this ‘realness’ to be contained within a constructed ‘inside’ space. That is to say, by virtue of the discursive dualism of inside-outside as a grid for the marking out of meaning, truth and authenticity and that compels this ‘realness’ to be held within an ‘inside’ territory, if a relationship and coupled-subject are to (necessarily) affirm a relation to truth for their knowability and legitimacy, an ‘inside’ space must be affirmed and occupied. In being bound to this way of relating to ‘truth’, the non-monogamous and non-dyadic relationship (and subject) as constructed in the above extracts, occupy the same space that is constructed and authorised in sexually monogamous relationships. For their relationships to be made intelligible and experienced as a ‘relationship’ despite their unconventionalities, Brian and Barry appear to be obliged to deploy the same repertoire of linguistic resources, practice the same ‘game of truth’ (an ‘inside’ has to be inhabited and a vilified ‘outside’ mastered), and live out the same metaphoric realities in similarly featured spaces.
As such the ‘alternative’ relationship is produced and regulated in and by a conventional relation to truth that privileges the *containment of authenticity* (a principle theme of coupledom that is that is developed in this and subsequent analyses). In occupying an ‘inside’ space and drawing authenticity from this, the fearful and threatening ‘outside’ seen to be lurking in Geraldine’s (monogamous) couple-home is similarly present and devalued within the ‘boundaries’ of ‘non-conventional’ dyadic containment. That such ‘alternative’ practices search out this hegemonic relation to truth means that these relationships and the subjectivities of their occupants are discursively, and thus psychologically, established along very similar lines to sexually monogamous relationships despite difference in sexual practice. This similarity begins, then, to highlight ways in which a ‘non-monogamous’ resistance to hetero-patriarchal hegemony is always and already bound up with, activated against, and itself constrained by the power of couple containment, its set of constitutive dualisms, and its authenticating authority.

In this section I have gone some way in the deconstruction of the concept and value of couple exclusivity as a fortified ‘inside’ and hierarchically prioritised ‘containment’ that can cut across the discursive practices of both sexual monogamy and non-monogamy (and across gender and sexuality). Manifest in ‘monogamy’ and reoccurring in constructions of ‘non-monogamous’ relationships as emotionally monogamous, the metaphoric dualisms, their hierarchical codifications, and the consequent psychological reifications are seen as producing regulatory power effects in terms of the (re)production of couple knowledge, experience, practice and subjectivity. In the following section I continue to explore the productivity of a pervasive and privileged ‘containment of authenticity’ with regards to a further conceptual and constitutive dualism that works to channel and authenticate meaning and experience – that of *order-chaos*.

### 5.5 Dyadic order and averting chaos

“What I want is a little cosmos (with its own time, its own logic) inhabited only by ‘the two of us’.” (Barthes, 1977: 139)
The metaphorically and psychologically reified enclosure of couple containment and its presumed opposite – the unsafe, excluded outside - are further objectified by Angela and Allan as they talk about what sexual monogamy is against what it is not.

Angela [H/M]: I just don’t think there’s anything quite as strong and as sacred as an intimate bond between two individuals. As soon as another person’s involved it gets mixed up and spread out and it’s just different.

Allan [G/M]: It’s like something that is non-broken is whole. Something that’s broken is broken. It’s not working anymore. A monogamous relationship is a whole thing. And if someone is non-monogamous then it’s broken. It’s damaged.

Echoing the motifs of a privileged strength and sacred status used to construct and qualify couple-containment in previous extracts, Angela construes an exclusive ‘essence’ of dyadic containment that is to be captured, and only possibly so, by the connected unity of two. The involvement of a third party ‘mixes up’ and ‘spreads out’ this objectified essence which Allan similarly conceives as a working ‘whole’ juxtaposed with images of a non-operable, broken and damaged ‘thing’. In these constructions sexual monogamy is formulated as a reified and strong, yet fragile, sacred wholeness and is attributed the function of keeping relationships (as structure, space and object) firm, airtight and in regular working order. In the following excerpt Ricky construes this essence as a ‘central overlap’ that keeps a relationship from ‘spinning out of control’ and thus keeps it in working order. His transcribed response below is prompted by being asked about his thoughts and opinions of non-monogamy.

Ricky [G/M]: It {a monogamous relationship} is like a sort of Venn diagram or whatever. Do you know what I mean? There must be a central type overlap that keeps it all, you know, that keeps it all from spinning out of control.

Here Ricky represents a monogamous relationship as being like a Venn diagram. Such a diagrammatic analogy serves to highlight a spatialised and organising ‘central type overlap’ that represents the (objectified) presence and function of containment. The circles of the Venn diagram ‘overlap’ to clearly circumscribe the exclusive space of couple enclosure that holds in an ‘essence’. This ‘central overlap’ of containment, however it may be configured, is made necessary as the controlling apparatus of stability and order. It is the central point around which all else is fixed together and made stable and around which movement is minimised. As movement is minimised and thus regulated around the one pivot or central
element, seepage and chaos are averted. In the above three extracts, the fidelity and containment of sexual monogamy is privileged and made present not out of any overt moral prohibition and observance or even as human instinct, but because it serves as a means for keeping a relationship in regulated and controllable order.

Elizabeth [L/M]: Me personally, I think I could never be in a three-way relationship. That would never work for me. I think it’s very messy and complicated. A lot of people get hurt. So monogamy is important for um, a relationship to work.

Marianne [H/M]: [...] each relationship would probably be shallower, for want of a better word, than actually channelling all that {intimacy} into one relationship where you’re spreading it over a number of different people.

Here the status, wholeness, and working order of monogamous dyadic containment, and of a relationship itself, is discursively produced against images of a constructed chaos to do with the mess, complications and the sprawl of an externalised non-containment and the ‘hurt’ it can create. The ethical choices, desires, and conduct of these (sexually) monogamous subjects, like Geraldine and Tricia (page 138), is a mastery over an outside realm construed as altogether chaotic, superficial and unregulated. As in Angela’s earlier extract (page 146), Marianne constructs an assumed non-containment of non-monogamy as (perhaps) involving a leakage of exclusive intimacy into spread out and ‘shallower’ relationships. In this the further dualism of depth and superficiality as a grid of intelligibility, qualifier of inside-outside, and marker of relational ‘authenticity’ is made explicit.

Significant to Marianne’s quote is the active and deliberate channelling of an apparent entirety, abundance and possible excess of (sexual and emotional) intimacy down through a singular conduit to one contained deposit or ‘home’. While the ‘all that’ of exclusive intimacy is to be channelled into, ordered and contained within one relationship there is the idea that the ‘all that’, and the abundance it implies, is at the same time limited and cannot, therefore, be spread too thinly else it lose its essence, wholeness and workability and becomes shallow. Reflected in this is the psychological assertion that it is the quantity of time in terms of an unbroken and continuous interaction that positively contributes to relationship intimacy and satisfaction more than quality (Duck and Pittman, 1994; Gilbertson et al, 1998). So alongside the construed order, wholeness and self-sufficiency of a housed couple containment - characteristics that are rhetorically driven in being opposed to an ‘outside’ shallowness and
diversification - there is an economic fragility of limited resources that are not free-flowing but have to be dammed up and kept in the one enclosed space. In her feminist critique of the ‘ideologies’ of monogamy and non-monogamy, Overall (1998) refers to an anxiety over finite resources within couple relationships that she argues is consistent with capitalist and monogamous culture. Here Overall suggests that implicit in the economic metaphoricity of coupledom is that spending resources in one location means less for another and that one person’s gain is another’s loss: that relationships are zero-sum games (all or nothing). On this basis Overall argues that sexual monogamy acts like an insurance against an apparent or potential scarcity of commodity.

Such an economy of resources and directed flow of desire, satisfaction and pleasure is reflected in the following extracts from interviews with two non-monogamous participants where a sexual (not emotional) excess is allowed to overflow but not at the expense of a non-divisible containment and all that is to be stored within it. Here we can see Overall’s (1998) monogamous anxiety over finite resources being re-produced in non-monogamous contexts. (NM1 = sexually non-monogamous but emotionally monogamous relationships).

_Samantha [B/NM1]:_ Um, well it’s like three’s a crowd. / MF: okay / Like it, it’s hard to split your time evenly [...] that’s when it all goes sour. You know? Well are we having a relationship or not? And with someone else how do you, / MF: mm / if you’re spending your time divided?

_Brian [G/NM1]:_ And then their relationship {a non-monogamous couple who brought in a third party} started having problems. And um, I thought it all centred around well you’re not concentrating on one person anymore, you’re concentrating on two. So when you’re giving something to one, you’re not giving it to the other one […] Things get hard. How do you expect to have a relationship, you know, when you’re dividing up your emotions?

In talking about engagement in ‘secondary’ relationship (not their practice) these participants continue with the discursive systematisations of inside-outside and of ordered and chaotic realms in relation to a presence of third parties. Here the couple relationship is no longer being constituted as a location or structure exactly but it is nonetheless depicted as a totals(ed)ing entity, object and channel that cannot be divided, split or overflow and that similarly contains the finite resources of the coupled-subject. Hence the introduction of a third party is construed as the diversion of some of those relationship resources to that third
party. Negative notions of a split, disconnected and divided containment and emotion are juxtaposed to the discursive concept and metaphorical privileging of dyadic connection, wholeness and indivisibility. And in their constructions of couple containment, time, energy and emotional resources are themselves made to exist as indivisible and as being concentrated by being channelled into the dyadic container lest they seep into an externalised superficiality and lose their effect. Seepage (a recurrent theme) of concentration, time and energy from the dyadic chamber or home would for these narrators render a ‘relationship’ unrecognisable and even not possible. ‘Well are we having a relationship or not?’ and ‘How do you expect to have a relationship?’: these become the pertinent questions when time, emotions and energy are diversified and ‘split’ and an ‘essence’ of relationship broken through division of already finite resources. In this exclusory logic of an emotionally monogamous ‘non-monogamy’ (NM1) that is opposed to ‘secondary’ relationships, dyadic containment is again being intensified, loci of exclusion are extended to pragmatics and the construed economic chaos of emotional (non-contained) excess is averted as a means of relational practicality and authenticity. Thus even when not sexually monogamous the “marital [or couple] adventure can be relied on to absorb a large amount of energy that might otherwise be expended dangerously” (Berger and Kellner, 1964; cited in Kitzinger, 1989: 90). So again the point can be made that while non-monogamous relationships are frequently portrayed as alternative and radical (e.g. Rogers, 1973; Weeks et al, 2001; Jackson and Scott, 2004) the above analysis illustrates a monogamous-style regulation as being intensified in its production of a monogamously contained emotion, time and use of resources.

In this way, the elements of control and discipline are at work in (embedded in) this particular regulation of time and resources (Rose, 1999). The logic of limited, non-divisible and diverted resources can be read as actively governing subjects and relationships (both monogamous and non-monogamous) in terms of what one can and cannot do with such resources and in how they are to be disconnected from third parties and other relationships so as to solidify the one privileged connection (of two) and maximise that which is seen as being contained. In that personal resources and capability, because they are ‘finite’ in the couple domain, are best channelled rather than spread about, conduct and the possibility of relational multiplicity (or diverse connections) are acutely monitored and controlled as a ‘proper’ use of resources is specified and a chaotic excess disallowed. Surveillance, argues
Rose (1999: 234), “is ‘designed in’ to the flows of everyday existence”. The use of time and resources, and the degree of concentration seen as necessary for a relationship to exist and be maintained is no exception to this everyday surveillance that is ‘designed in’ to what having a relationship means. Shotter (1985) similarly interprets the practical activities of social relationships as not merely ordering relationships themselves but as producing and sustaining the very fabric of social order upon which relational pragmatics, and the subject able to perform them, are made intelligible and constituted.

“[O]ur accounting practices work both to create and maintain a certain pattern of social relations, a social order, and to constitute us as beings able to reproduce that order in all our practical activities.”

(Shotter, 1985: 82)

In other words, managing time and other resources can be seen as constitutive and regulatory practices by which accounts are made of relationships, conduct and each other and by which the political and economic status quo is effectively maintained. Specifically, the accounting practices of participants as highlighted above can be seen to constitute relationships and the coupled-subject in terms of the productions and regulations of metaphoric channels and what these serve to direct towards, and divert from, the contain(ed)ing chamber of the couple-home. In taking on the specific function of metaphoric channels that act as (and for) conceptual and discursive navigations through the field of personal relationships and contained subjectivity, the totalising dualisms of inside-outside, depth-superficiality, order-chaos, safety-fear, for example, serve to separate, direct and gravitate the flow of connections, concentrations, resources and experience. As such they can be interpreted as metaphoric channels of normalising power inasmuch as they positively code, lock in and authorise a unilateral flow of energy, desire and connectivity between a coupled twosome while restricting other possible flows and distributions.

Indeed, as Deleuze (see Deleuze, 1953; Deleuze and Guattari, 1977, 1980) suggests, one way of coding the flows and channels of coupledom and arresting motion is through the (capitalist) ‘disjunctive synthesis’ of contained exclusivities that detaches subjects and relationships from a ‘connective synthesis’ (on which the organising principle of ‘possessive’ pairing is imposed as a means of control in order to sustain familial relations; cf. Robinson, 1977). The above extracts, and the interpretation of them, underscore the function and
effect of such a disjunctive synthesis and the way in which it regulates subjects and relationships by coding particular connections and flows as being necessary for a favoured ‘containment’ while decoding other possibilities and potential lines of flight as chaotic, superficial and destructive. For Deleuze, a prime characteristic of the social units of couples (and families) is that they are not added to one another but exclude one another and this results in units and people that are not ‘whole’ but always partial in their containments and finalities. “Thus, anything positive is taken away from the [creative and inventive] social, and instead the social is saddled with negativity, limitation, and alienation” (Deleuze, 1953: 45). In this way the all-sufficient, all-encompassing, non-divisible ‘whole’, ‘inside’ or ‘depth’ of couple containment can be deconstructed as producing its own limitation and partiality – a partiality that attempts to maximise in the damming up of limited resources but a partiality that is nevertheless continually (re)produced in these examples of the containments of monogamous, non-dyadic, and emotionally exclusive non-monogamous relationships.

On a general level the extracts so far have highlighted a discursively formulated and culturally coded power-knowledge wherein anything other than an exclusive flow into a spatialised and reified dyadic containment is constituted as misdirected (and for psychology often pathological; see chapter two). Even for sexually non-monogamous participants where the ‘flow of sex’ outside the dyadic relationship is explicitly allowed, the ‘containment of authenticity’ is nevertheless reproduced in a dualistic logic and metaphoric channelling that determines, authenticates and regulates the flow of emotions, resources and energies into the dyadic chamber; a discursive logic and channelling that opens up discursive spaces of possibility and closes off others. The non-monogamous (NM1) claim of ‘misdirection’ to external realms and detached others (third parties) has been interpreted as a function of operative dualisms and channels and the power relations these serve to establish. On these terms, I suggest that ‘fidelity’ (sexual and/or emotional) can be seen as being a matter of ethical adherence to a ‘proper’ channelling into dyadic containment whether this adherence is manifest as either sexual or emotional faithfulness or both. The point to be emphasised so far from this analysis of the discursive complex and disjunctive synthesis of the couple matrix is that the domain exists, is ascribed its meaning, purpose, and value at the point where the dichotomised discursive ‘realities’ of inside-outside, order-chaos and depth-superficiality collide with and infuse each other. In that each sector or segment always and already ‘secretly inhabits’ the other (Derrida, 1976) the ‘normalised’ couple experience is not
inherently ‘whole’ or ‘totalised’ but already predicated on division. It is not indicative of ‘completeness’ but always partial inasmuch as it represents but one slice of possibility. In sum, the constructed ‘essence’ of contained and containing coupledom is one that continually pivots on what is faithfully and masterfully excluded.

To consolidate further this deconstruction of the discursive practice and power-knowledge of couple containment, in the next section I continue to critically attend to text procured from sexually non-monogamous relationships (both same and opposite sex) and include text from non-monogamous relationships that allow for ancillary relationships (NM2) as a way of further illustrating the discursive (re)productions of non-monogamous enclosure and thus (ironically) what it means to be dyadically contained. This analytic development is prefaced by a critique of the wider literature of ‘alternative’ relationships that extends the introductory discussion offered in chapter two.

5.6 The enclosure of non-monogamy

A significant aspect to the warrant, privilege and purpose of dyadic containment can be seen as being produced in relation to a pre-supposed threatening chaos that lies ‘outside’ the borders of an ‘ideally’ ordered and controlled relationship – the same pre-supposition (variously framed) that is embedded in mainstream psychological and sociological theorisations of the couple relationship and its alleged redemptive and organisational purposes. In their sociological theory of ‘open relationships’, for example, O’Neill and O’Neill (1972) purport that the one-to-one relationship (sexually monogamous or otherwise) reflects an innate human need for structure and for “the ordering [of] our experience out of chaos [and] into meaningful units” (ibid.: 22). The ‘meaning’ of the relationship experience, or ‘unit’, is thus made a function of a discursively framed dyadic ‘order’ that assumes a pre-existing and opposing ‘chaos’ and for Mazur (1973) provides a sense of continuity and common destiny. And this relational ‘order’ is theoretically and culturally construed as being manifest and managed in a ‘monogamous’ relationship that may not be sexually exclusive but which is nevertheless ‘monogamous’ in that it practices the ‘order’ of an emotionally exclusive ‘bond’ that is frequently naturalised.
“Universal monogamous union may not be sexually exclusive or last for a lifetime, but its presence everywhere supports the fact the one-to-one relationship is a basic human pattern.”

(O’Neill and O’Neill, 1972: 22)

“[T]here are enduring values to a one-to-one primary relationship which cannot be easily supplanted.”

(Mazur, 1973: 11)

“The tendency of sexual relationships to be dyadic (not to be confused with monogamous) is probably to some degree a result of the unconscious desire to recapitulate that feeling of exclusivity which the infant enjoys with its mother.”

(Giddens, 1992: 138)

As pointed out in chapter two, the premise of this liberal-humanist argument is that sexual monogamy in the context of traditional contractual marriage is unrealistic, untenable, and undemocratic but that the ‘dyadic monogamy’ of pair-bondedness is nevertheless a ‘natural’ phenomenon involving strong social and psychological imperatives. ‘Monogamy’ as a practice of guarded exclusivity is separated from sexual fidelity and grafted onto the emotionality of dyad containment, but in both applications the concept of a one-to-one monogamy is used to signify a natural(ised) and inevitable ‘normality’ of couple (en)closure that authenticates the sought after ‘truth’ of a relationship and the integrity of couple ‘identity’. According to the O’Neill’s best-selling book Open Marriage: A new lifestyle for couples (1972), dyadic containment in the form of a synergistic ‘oneness’ is the basis on which “people can find the stability in which to experience the full intimacy of a one-to-one relationship” (ibid.: 26). As in the extracts presented in the previous section, the notion of a ‘full’ emotional intimacy is made the property of, channeled into, and restricted to an exclusive dyadic enclosure. On such grounds, psychosocial theory on ‘alternative’ relationships (e.g. Rogers, 1973; Mazur, 1973; Giddens, 1992; Weeks et al., 2001) serves to reinstate the assumed naturalness and purpose of the exclusive pair-bond, theorising ‘alternative’, ‘expanded’ and ‘pure’ relational practices and identities from this not re-configured premise and thus consolidating the very sense of ‘closedness’ it purports to challenge.
In this way, as Jackson and Scott (2004: 151) suggest in arguing for a more sustainable challenge to the primacy of the monogamous (usually heterosexual) couple, “the critique of [sexual and emotional] monogamy has become so muted as to be almost inaudible.” In their feminist critique of sexual monogamy, Jackson and Scott argue that the 1970s feminist resistance to sexual monogamy (e.g. Firestone, 1979; Comer, 1974) did not just concern sex but was a challenge to the patriarchal institution of coupledom more broadly. These authors also note that from the 1980s onwards the politics of non-monogamy was thwarted by a negative association with an individualistic and hedonistic (masculinised) pursuit of sexual variety and that “it seems that many [radical feminists] simply returned to more predictable couple relationships” (Jackson and Scott, 2004: 153). This ideological retreat and focus on sexual exclusivity as the villain is indeed reflected in recent sociological theory that explicitly theorises and celebrates the ‘liberations’ of sexual and/or emotional non-monogamy while re-substantiating the conventions of pair-bonding and dyadic (one-to-one) containment (e.g. Weeks et al, 2001).

My opposition to the 1970s literature and the more recent celebration of ‘open relationships’ is closely aligned with Kitzinger’s (1987, 1989) feminist critique of the liberal-humanist construction and assumed ‘liberation’ of lesbianism. Kitzinger targets the liberal-humanist perspective from the mid 1970s onwards as an alternative mode of discourse by which a lesbian identity and lifestyle are seen to be depathologised and legitimated, arguing that such accounts presumed to offer greater social acceptability to lesbian (and homosexual) identity while ironically serving “the purposes of the dominant order [of a politicised Western culture] by reinforcing and validating its moral rhetoric” (Kitzinger, 1989: 84). Conceiving liberal-humanism as a coherent ideological framework emanating from ‘both academic and folk theorising’, Kitzinger is suspect of its reproduction of dominant Western norms and values such as the centrality of romantic love, the importance of personal happiness, and the adjustments of a ‘mature’ self-actualisation as the very terms by which socially marginalised groups are allegedly liberated. The supposed freedom, equality, and happy social assimilation of lesbians and other oppressed minorities offered by such an ideology, she suggests, is intricately bound up with social control (cf. Rose, 1989, 1999; Foucault, 1978a) in that these values and the kinds of ‘healthy’, ‘morally sound’, ‘freely chosen’ identities and lifestyles they enforce serve to usefully reproduce and validate the social-moral norms of heterosexist coupledom. For Kitzinger, liberal-humanism with its promotion of ‘healthy’ and ‘mature’
individuals and its non-problematised assimilation of different identities and relationships into socially accepted norms does not represent ‘liberation’ from oppression but a return to moral convention by which ‘difference’ is de-politicised and thus made acceptable.

One way in which Kitzinger sees liberal-humanism as promoting lesbianism as a viable choice and way of life is by affording the lesbian ‘equal’ social and psychological status in her ability to know the same kind of ‘true love’ that ‘well-adjusted heterosexuals’ are capable of. Thus in buying into the ideology of ‘romantic love’ as a means of explaining and legitimating her experience, lesbians are complicit in the very system that oppresses her. Kitzinger’s argument has currency also in the ways in which liberal-humanist theory depathologises non-monogamy and non-conventional couple relationships by accrediting these ‘alternative’ practices as viable pathways to a better kind of ‘love’ and more authentic way of relating; ideals that are already bound up with the conventions of social order and thus offering no point of political departure. Thus while liberal-humanism may usefully serve to depathologise the choices of lesbians, gay men and non-monogamous relationships, in a depathologisation that makes these lifestyles ‘acceptable’ according to conventional standards it fails to challenge very much at all.

The problems involved in liberal-humanist constructions of ‘open marriages’ and affirmations of a ‘monogamous’ convention that is defined outside of sexual restriction is one that practitioners of ‘open’ marriage are themselves troubled by. Tyler, for example, has at times been involved in ‘polyamorist’ (group marriage) relationships and has observed many more through his involvement with polyamorist support groups.

*Tyler [H/NM2/ND]*: I think a lot of us {polyamorists} are actually handling our three sided relationships as a series of one-to-one relationships. Taking a lot from the monogamous culture and applying it, making it fit. Sort of hammering it till it fits into place. The round peg in the square hole sort of thing [...] Um, you’ve got a much greater level of social acceptance from people. A lot more support. Resources are available to you. It’s easier because you focus on each other one at a time. Um, the whole social-cultural milieu in the West is geared towards it.
What Tyler claims to have experienced and observed is the wide adoption of a hegemonic monogamous culture by practitioners of polyamorist relationships where the traditional dyadic model is ‘hammered’ until it fits into place. And equally importantly, polyamorist relationships that are construed and lived within the parameters of monogamy are not much of a challenge to the very model being resisted. For Tyler, like Kitzinger’s critique, the (mis)application of a monogamous principle is a matter of convenience, practicality and social acceptability. Elsewhere in his interview he talks of being suspicious of the 1970s research into ‘alternative’ relationship models (particularly the work of the O’Neills) in that what was then recommended as a means of resistance has since been easily assimilated by mainstream theory on couple relationships (in Masters et al, 1982; Giddens, 1992, for example) and perhaps by everyday practice (see Foucault, 1978a, 1981b). In the humanist recommendations for a personal autonomy and a self-actualisation that is allegedly best procured in an ‘open’ relationship that solidifies the exclusive dyad to the point of a transcendental ‘oneness’, it does seem that these postulations of an ‘alternative’ model have had more effect in shaping and reconfirming social convention and normative standards.

I now move on to explore ways in which the conceptual premise of dyadic primacy and practice are made to apply to non-dyadic relationships which are then made to fit normative principles and constructions. In this and subsequent sections, then, I further develop the argument that the contemporary practice of non-monogamy (in its various forms) can serve to constitute and enforce a fidelity to dyadic convention – intensifying the privileged and ‘monogamous’ principle of dyadic containment as a matter of ordered containment and authenticity.

In the following extracts, Barry and Michael talk about their triadic (sexually non-monogamous but emotionally monogamous) relationship that at the time of interview had existed for seventeen months. Barry begins by describing the effect that introducing a third person had on his original and ten year non-monogamous relationship with Andrew.  

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5 The current three-way relationship (all three live together) occurred after Barry met Michael and then introduced him to Andrew who subsequently ‘fell in love’ with Michael. Prior to meeting Michael, Barry and Andrew (who over the previous ten years had practiced sexual non-monogamy) had talked about the possibility of ‘opening’ their relationship up to another (sexually versatile) partner.
Barry \(\text{G/NM1/ND}\): That hasn’t changed. / MF: okay / It’s grown. Um, we still, I mean probably an example of that is that we’ve always stated that in the early phase of Michael, if anything would have happened that would prove that this expansion of the relationship, if you like, wasn’t working, / MF: mm / the fall back position is Andrew and I are not threatened. And we would continue. / MF: mm / And unfortunately that would mean the dissolving of the third party from that relationship. / MF: mm / So the reason we gave permission, if you like, for the three to come together was under the clear understanding that we, I think, inwardly knew that even if a third person came into the relationship that what Andrew and I have, in the emotional sense, was so rock solid, and still is rock solid to the core […] We were very sure that that, our relationship as we have it now, between Andrew and I, would not be put under threat or put in a precarious position as a result of that growth if you like.

This excerpt of Barry’s narrative on the expansion of his original relationship with Andrew shores up the power-knowledge and rhetorical constructions of dyadic exclusivity as hitherto highlighted. It also reflects research into the alleged ‘openness’ of gay male relationships where protecting the ‘primary bond’ and dyadic commitment is widely emphasised (e.g. Marshall, 1985; Marcus, 1992; Weeks \textit{et al}, 2001; Weeks, 2004). Though the boundaries are drawn up around a central ‘core’ rather than space (this relational space is occupied by three), the image repertoires of inside-outside, inclusion-exclusion, depth-superficiality and order-chaos are still prevalent as the impenetrable solidity of a couple ‘rock’ is set up against an external ‘other’ even as that other enters their relational space. This text can be read as a re-affirmation, indeed an augmentation of the principle of dyadic containment by virtue of the way in which such containment is to be confirmed and guaranteed as a preparation for the kind of ‘expansion’ being described. The extract reflects the 1970s humanist notion of ‘open’ marriage where it is argued that “precisely because this bond is so deep, so secure and so central to their lives, they [a couple] can afford to open it up and let others in” (O’Neill and O’Neill, 1972: 177). Barry uses precisely this rationale for opening up his relationship. But the rationale can be problematised as involving an ironic tension that thwarts rather than encourages change and that produces a convergence of liberal ‘openness’ and monogamous ‘closure’ such that the containment being constructed here is one of \textit{enclosure}.

As a containment of ‘enclosure’ the dyadic chamber that Barry describes can be contrasted to the more explicit ‘closure’ of dyadic sexual/emotional monogamy as previously illustrated. This ‘enclosure’ does not close-off and block-out as is the case with monogamous ‘closure’ because the public or an excess is allowed to exist in the space of containment. But as the
borders of containment are here somewhat blurred, an inner sanctum is being delineated and remains the exclusive space of the dyad, producing a containment within a containment. This contrast between ‘closure’ and ‘enclosure’ is not to suggest, however, that dyadic ‘enclosure’ is the liberal opposite of conventional ‘closure’. Rather the former is a form of resistance or, more specifically, a technology for allegedly bringing about ‘freedom from closure’ that is conditional on the very notion of ‘closure’ it purports to differentiate itself from. It is this point that the analysis goes on to illustrate and explore.

The pervasive discursive practice and conceptualisation of being ‘at home’ in the privileged space of a couple relationship, as replicated in this extract, confounds a humanistic ideation of relationship (and personal) transcendence and ‘growth’ (e.g. Fromm, 1957; Maslow, 1962; Rogers, 1973; Branden, 1981; Giddens, 1992). Following Barry’s opening statement that the initial couple relationship ‘hasn’t changed’ (and ‘would continue’ and ‘dissolve’ Michael if necessary) there is subsequent talk of relationship ‘growth’ as a result of adding Michael (referred to in the last line of the extract as ‘that growth’). The relationship between Barry and Andrew is talked about as being unaltered but also as being expanded and grown. Such a tension is not characteristic of Barry’s narrative alone but is also frequently apparent in humanistic psychosocial theory. “It is important to fully establish your relationship with your mate before trying outside relationships”, suggest O’Neill and O’Neill (1972: 179, emphasis added). Mazur (1973) similarly recommends the firm centrality of the ‘dynamic core’ of a primary relationship before extensions are allowed for. This is as if a primary relationship can somehow be made finite and complete, remain unchanged and not be impacted on by the involvement of a third person or others. What has gone before must seemingly triumph in unaltered form and the power of ‘continuation’ (where things are to remain the same even in ‘transcendence’ and ‘liberation’) lies with a ‘consistency’ ideal being justified and coded as an indicator of (relational and personal) authenticity. Against this rationality ‘growth’ is constructed as potentially placing the authenticity of couple identity and relationships ‘in a precarious position’. Hence the positive ‘growth’ Barry alludes to in relation to the inclusion of Michael in the initial dyadic relationship is simultaneously constituted as not growth in that including him shouldn’t change it.

There is, then, evident in the extract a tension or underlying paradox between a relationship said to be ‘expanded’ and an exclusive ‘rock solid core’, or one-to-one emotional
containment, that remains unchanged. While the initial relationship is open to a third party the centralised and privileged ‘rock solid core’ involving Barry and Andrew is to continue as is and not be threatened ‘as a result of that growth’. What ‘growth’ consists of thus becomes a tricky if not occluded problem. It’s as if the expanded relationship (or containment) can have one trajectory while an inner ‘solid’ essence or dyadic core is to have no further trajectory at all but remain untouched and unaltered. Thus there is a separation being constituted here as an ‘expanded’ relationship can be divided from (almost lived separately to) an emotional ‘core’ that remains the property and ‘inward’ experience of a dyad. In the ‘enclosure’ of this non-monogamous containment, sexual and emotional excess is not being blocked, shut-out or disallowed but there is nonetheless a centrifugal force at work that simultaneously seeks out and confirms an exclusive centre as the ironic condition of expansion.

As apparent in the O’Neill’s quote above, and echoed by Barry, this conceptual division has utility in that it allows for relational ‘openness’, ‘expansion’ and ‘growth’ while keeping in place an inner ‘containment’ as the mechanism for control; that is, for keeping things from spinning out of control (to repeat Ricky’s expression cited earlier). On the one hand, according to Barry’s account, the expansion of the relationship was being planned while, on the other, ‘fall back’ positions were being set up with the aim of keeping a privileged and non-divisible ‘core’ from being threatened and to assure its continuation. This relationship may be ‘open’ to Michael but the exclusive inner sanctum of dyadic containment occupied by Barry and Andrew, at least initially, is constituted as one which remains closed, in order and certain to continue in its present form. Like constructions of the relational ‘home’ and the ‘closure’ of monogamous containment, this ‘rock solid core’ or exclusive inner sanctum operates as the site from which external ‘threats’ are formulated, invited in and warded off. It is precisely upon the privileged status of ‘enclosure’ that Barry speaks of giving ‘permission’, of ‘dissolving’ Michael from the peripheral position assigned to him, and upon which he is able to authorise the survival of the ‘core’. It is the similar privilege of a ‘utopian monogamy’ that Mazur (1973) advances in his theory of ‘open-ended marriages’ that are purportedly (and paradoxically) free and flexible “while celebrating the enduring and creative aspects of monogamy” (ibid.: 78).
Michael was asked about what changes he had observed in the initial relationship between Barry and Andrew since his involvement and his truncated response is reproduced here.

*MF:* Have you noticed any differences or changes, or not, in the long standing relationship during your time as a partner?

*MICHAEL* /G/NM1/ND/: Momentary changes. I realised at the beginning that they have something very special. / MF: mm / They’ve something to me that is indestructible. Ar, if there was a danger of me destroying it by going into it, I would have literally forced myself out of it. / MF: mm / Um, but they have something that maybe to a point that’s played on my securities [...]. There is a bond there. There’s a, that I don’t know if I will ever achieve it in my lifetime. I don’t know if I will. Ar, but I recognise it, I know it’s there [...] But what they have I just don’t think anyone can touch [...] I want to add to it and be up there with it.

To the question posed Michael answers ‘momentary changes’ and then immediately begins to position himself as peripheral to what he attributes his partners as ‘having’. Michael uses the metaphoric signification of ‘bond’ to objectify a dyadic essence but there is also a strong sense of exclusive space as he talks about ‘going into it’ and moving ‘out of it’. And this distinction is significant in terms of how Michael discursively construes his involvement in the triad. On the one hand Michael goes into a space that is constituted by Barry at least, suggesting that he has equal access to this space (having posed no danger) and that in this space he shares in the relationship. What then follows is a shift from an open and shared space to a sovereign ‘up there’ bond between Barry and Andrew that Michael, echoing Barry’s depiction of ‘a rock solid core’, constructs as ‘special’ and ‘indestructible’, as a privileged and exclusive object that no one else – himself included - ‘can touch’. In not being able to touch the objectified ‘bond’ but having ambition to ‘be up there with it’, Michael is clearly peripheral and cannot penetrate the object of this ‘rock solid core’ as he does the space around it.6

This bifurcated construction of a relationship as both a space and an object is consistent with Barry’s division of the two. In the analysis of Barry’s extract above it was suggested that

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6 I note that during the course of his interview Michael expressed satisfaction with the relationship and the efforts made to include him on an ‘equal’ basis. While positioning himself as secondary to the bond between Barry and Andrew, Michael also articulated a preference for a three-way bond that is just as exclusive and contained. After joining this expanded relationship, Michael interestingly talks of ‘closing the door’ behind him, thus drawing on the same discursive resource of ‘home’ to mark out (extended) space and enclosure.
in his construction of his ‘open’ relationship with Andrew there is both an opening up of relational space and an acute demarcation of an objectified and closed off ‘core’. It is this inclusive space that Michael can inhabit while remaining set apart from its exclusive object; a separation that he talks about as playing ‘on my securities’. In both extracts, Michael is simultaneously included and excluded as a function of this space/object differential that is in operation in the (early days of) this triadic relationship. The power effect of this discursive process is that bounded segments are drawn across an expanded relationship that can serve to extend the figurative and literal space of dyadic practice while simultaneously consolidating and reinforcing it.\(^7\)

The power relations involved in this practice of non-monogamous ‘enclosure’ are further illustrated in the following quotations where Christine is talking about an exclusive and ‘special’ intimacy between herself and her partner that she refers to as being one of the reasons why their sexual non-monogamy - and presumably the allowed for ability to engage in ‘secondary’ relationship (NM2) - works for them.

Christine \([L/NM2]\): And I think that \{a ‘different sort of intimacy’\} is what separates my relationship with Barbara from all our other relationships. / MF: mm / And that’s part of the reason why we can be non-monogamous. Well for me anyway. Our primary relationship is different to all our other relationships. / MF: ah ah / Yeah, that’s special. So maybe on some level I want emotional monogamy.

What can be seen as being ‘present’ in the interiority of this primary dyad is a ‘special’ intimacy that is ‘different’ from all others and that sets Christine and Barbara’s relationship apart from the ‘secondary’ others. Even whilst ‘secondary’ relationships involving emotional connection are allowed there is still (at least as fantasy) an emotional exclusivity. Here an emotionally exclusive ‘intimacy’ (‘different’ because it is not predicated on sexual exclusivity) is utilised to authenticate the relationship and to separate out other intimacies and distance

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\(^7\) In his interview Andrew states that ‘For me there’s no primary relationship any more’ and that ‘It’s almost like, um, two loves forming into one as time goes by’ but he also positions himself as the central figure in the triad. So while he dismisses the idea of dyadic hierarchy Andrew also frequently reinstates it by positioning himself as the central (primary) figure in the two dyadic links he draws up. His ideal, as he states it, is that this separation will diminish over time and that the one relationship involving the three men will develop to encompass and overshadow the three individual relationships. In his interview Andrew focuses more on the pragmatics (sexual, legal, social and domestic) of the ‘dynamic, frustrating and difficult’ triadic relationship as it stands, uncomfortable with both the terms ‘couple’ and ‘three-way’ as terms to identify it.
these from the ‘primary’ relationship. Similar to Barry’s extract above, there is not so much a ‘transformation’ of the concept of bounded intimacy that recent theorists assert same sex ‘open’ relationships as manifesting (e.g. Giddens, 1992; Weeks et al, 2001; Jackson and Scott, 2004; Weeks, 2004). Rather a replication of dyadic containment as an exclusive and impenetrable ‘intimacy’ is constructed as providing some control over non-monogamous practice and the emotional involvement of others. That Christine and Barbara are able to interact with and know others in sexual and emotional ways remains dependent on, and relative to, an exclusive intimacy that demarcates and privileges their relationship over and above others. As Christine goes on to say:

*Christine [L/NM2]*: I can be happy with the relationship even knowing that she’s {Barbara} emotionally involved with someone else, when I’m sure of how she feels about me.

Within this non-monogamous ‘enclosure’ – even where sexual and emotional involvement with others ostensibly transgresses the exclusivity of that ‘enclosure’ - the privileging of a ‘special’ intimacy and the transference of dyadic containment from sexual to emotional fidelity is the means by which Christine can ‘know’ how Barbara feels about her. An ‘authenticity’ of emotion and feeling, and the relation to truth that is thereby constructed, is made intelligible and is realised according to the practice and demonstration of emotional containment.

This non-monogamous ‘enclosure’ involves ‘emotional monogamy’ (a fantasy of Christine’s) as a form of fidelity that, perhaps even more than its sexual counterpart, specifically targets the flow and regulation of emotion and the exclusivity of feeling that are to be brought to account in the demonstration and confirmation of dyadic containment and the ‘feelings’ this gives rise to. That is, in the absence of sexual fidelity as a mark of relational containment and authenticity, regulation around the truth of how one ‘feels’ is tightened. Reflected in this extract is the assumption made by some relationship theorists that sexual non-monogamy and ancillary relationships are best ‘balanced’ or ‘countered’ by a strong emotional monogamy (e.g. Blumstein and Schwartz, 1983; Weeks et al, 2001) as if extra-dyadic involvement has to be brought under control, balanced out, and managed by recourse to an emotional fidelity as a way of re-organising an ordered containment of two, and as a means of guarding, protecting, certifying, and ensuring its continued existence. Again, in this dyadic
enclosure ‘monogamous’ containment is being reaffirmed and made the means of self-relationship authenticity. And this reaffirmation appears to work via the regulation of psychologised feelings and the truth of these rather than a more simple prohibition on sexual behaviour.

In this reading of the extracts, then, the issue of power – what is produced in terms of how the ‘couple’ experience can be framed and how relationships are made intelligible and authenticated – is not exclusive or unique to heterosexual monogamy as many relationship theorists assume in seeing non-monogamy (sexual and emotional) as heralding “possibilities for new relationships that can transcend the rigidities and inequalities of traditional forms of life” (Weeks et al., 2001: 182). In associating power only to monogamous relationships is to conceive power merely as domination and control which is to occlude its manifold productions and effects (Foucault, 1978a, 1983, 1984). Contrary to this, I have argued that productive power is also very much at work in ‘alternative’ relationship where multiple intensities and varied movements are produced while also often being short circuited in what Deleuze (1953) and Deleuze and Guattari (1977) refer to as the regulative ‘disjunctive synthesis’ of one-to-one pairing (an effect of a controlling power which can be specified as a structuralist binary logic).

While Scanzoni et al (1989) argue from a sociological perspective that in regards to multiple relationships there are logically “no limits either on permutations or on persons” (ibid.: 130), their idea of freedom depicts an autonomous subject who is allegedly able to create his or her own conditions for relationships rather than adjusting to structurally imposed ones. The logic embedded in the discursive ‘closures’ and ‘enclosures’ of dyadic containment, however, is a logic of limitation and exclusion and in its hegemony is not so easily ‘transcended’ by agentic subjects or ‘free’ relationships that, as the above analysis suggests, are always and already constituted and regulated by the discursively framed logic of the couple matrix that warrants containment as a mark of authenticity and a guarantee of continuation. My point here is that there is no logic anterior to discourse that can be accessed by an enlightened, liberated and self-acting subject. And there are no permutations of a ‘free’ identity or relationship that are not already constituted in and by a pre-existing power-knowledge that carves up and opposes fields of experience, that designs technologies for connection and...
disconnection, digs disciplinary conduits of affect, short circuits multiple intensities, and that advances self-relational containment as a primary substance of life and mark of truth.

Following early sociological theory on ‘open marriage’ and Giddens’ (1992) return to their recommendations of ‘openness’, Weeks et al (2001) argue that such innovative relational ‘possibilities’ emerge as a function of a freely negotiated and ‘transformed’ intimacy that is allegedly evident in contemporary couple relationships (for Weeks et al same-sex couples in particular). The suggestion is that these more flexible same-sex relationships dissolve the boundaries between friendships and separate sexual from emotional monogamy such that a greater choice and ‘free’ integration of multiple intimacies is allowed for. In short, the argument is that the practice of a ‘transformed intimacy’ represents a blurring of traditionally appropriate ways in which people can know and interact with each other. In the following section I counter this argument in an exploration of the non-monogamous regulation and short circuiting of ‘multiple intimacies’ as apparent in the ways in which participants talk of their sexually non-monogamous relationships that are also emotionally monogamous (NM1), indeed the kind of non-monogamous relationship that Weeks et al (2001) regards as (potentially) transformative. Thus in the final section of this chapter I illustrate and consider ways in which a celebrated ‘emotional monogamy’ detached from sexual restriction guards the ‘enclosure’ of non-monogamous containment and in so doing highlight some further problems with this reproduction.

5.7 Two’s company, three’s a crowd

In the following extracts the power of an authenticating dyadic containment is read as being particularly intensified in emotionally exclusive non-monogamous practice in terms of an explicit de-humanisation of those who are positioned as being external and potentially threatening to the privilege of exclusive coupledom.

_Brian [G/NM1]: [...] at no time has it {sexual non-monogamy} jeopardised our relationship. It’s keeping that fullness of intimacy with just your lover. Charlie and I are pretty strong in that every time we’ve had someone we treat it as if they’re just a plaything / MF: mm / They’re just a toy for us to play with. Um, and when we’ve had our fill, off they go. / MF: mm / And you know, we don’t have any problem with that. When it’s finished it’s all sort of back to normal._
Rodney [H/NM1]: And it’s like I said, having other people, outside people um, isn’t an emotional factor of our relationship. Our emotions are with each other [...] We’re not making love to a third party, we’re having sex with a third party. We’re being kinky [...] Like it, the someone else isn’t an issue in any threatening way or form. At the end of the day you walk out of that bedroom, or whatever, and it’s just her and I.

Brian and Rodney’s comments each reflect the other as much as they are reminiscent of Hollway’s (1984; 1989) ‘male sexual drive’ and ‘permissive’ discourses that pivot around a masculinist notion of unemotional sex. For Hollway the permissive discourse (which she suggests is ‘gender-blind’ in that it can also deployed by women) is the offspring of the hegemonic male-sexual-drive discourse that enhances men’s power in particular by affording them a ‘right’ to sex without emotion. On these same grounds other feminist theorists have critiqued non-monogamy as a hetero-patriarchal institution that prioritises male sexuality and the notion of sex as an uncontrollable physical force (e.g. Nichols, 1987; Overall, 1998). In these extracts the ‘male sexual drive’ and ‘permissive’ discourses converge in the discursive practice of sexual non-monogamy to make sense of and rationalise the unemotional sexual engagement with ‘third parties’. By drawing on these dominant discursive resources Brian and Rodney construct sex as ‘just sex’, as an unemotional, physical act that is neither about love nor reproduction. And this construction of sex is used to both contain and authorise their extra-dyadic sexual excess. It allows Brian to state that he and Charlie ‘don’t have any problem’ with their non-monogamy and enables Rodney’s comment that ‘we’re not making love to a third party, we’re having sex with a third party’. Here sex as a physical act is contrasted with the alternative construction of sex as ‘making love’. This second construction can be associated with Hollway’s ‘have-hold’ discourse that frames sexuality according to the quasi-Christian (though often secularised) ideals of monogamy, romantic partnership and family. She argues that the ‘have-hold’ and the ‘male sexual drive’ discourses “coexist in constructing men’s sexual practices” such that men are “recommend[ed] different and contradictory standards of [sexual] conduct” (Hollway, 1984: 232).

While ‘making love’ and ‘having sex’ reflect these contradictory standards, Brain and Rodney are able to eradicate possible tension and confusion between the two by allocating each a specific inside or outside context. Emotion, the ‘fullness of intimacy’ and ‘making love’ is the exclusive property of their primary (emotionally monogamous) relationships and ‘having sex’ a function of, and authorisation for, their non-monogamy. Sexual pleasure is had, excess is
managed, and dyadic containment kept fully in order by this discursive separation of sex and emotion and inside-outside. Similar to earlier extracts that metaphorically construct a strong relationship as being like a well structured house, Brian’s housing of emotion in dyadic containment allows him to talk of his relationship as being ‘strong’ and Rodney makes explicit reference to ‘outside’ others. Moreover, a non-monogamous ‘having sex’ is kept separate from a monogamous ‘making love’ by the explicit dehumanisation of ‘outside’ third parties who are constituted as mere ‘playthings’ whereupon emotional disengagement with this ‘other’ is both assured and justified.

Both Brian and Rodney similarly construct outsiders as ‘play things’ and ‘sex toys’ who in so being remain peripheral and non-threatening to a couple-containment that is to be kept guarded else it lose its potency. Against the privacy and privilege of emotionally monogamous containment, or non-monogamous enclosure, the ‘other’ is made third, distanced as an object of sexual pleasure, is not ascribed personal pronouns or personage, and is given only temporary rights of stay. When Brian talks of having ‘our fill’ it’s as if third parties as sex toys are a resource for topping up the finite resources that produce his and Charlie’s sexual pleasure as a couple. But the ‘have-hold’ imperative where sex and emotion are inseparable is also being reconfirmed at the same time. Elsewhere in his interview Brian talks of a strategy he and Charlie have for reaffirming their exclusive ‘bond’ while being sexually engaged with others. “[I]n just winking at one another, that whole message [of emotional exclusivity] is brought back and forth across to one another”. Through this dyadic channel flows an exclusive communication and energy that shores up limited resources and reaffirms their emotional monogamy. The men have their ‘fill’ and the integrity of the couple is not jeopardised as they re-emerge untarnished from the potential chaos of extra-dyadic pleasure.

Furthermore, for Brian the emotional disconnection from others is indicative of his and Charlie’s ‘strength’, implying that their (male) separation of sex and emotion that (in these extracts) produces de-humanised others is a matter of ethical mastery. Thus the practice of unemotional extra-dyadic sex is here both a matter of male sexual pleasure and self-relational ethics. The construction and practice of dehumanising others as an ethical practice is its warrant and justification. This reading of the extracts is not to suggest that such positioning of others doesn’t also meet the needs or intentions of the third parties or that the practice is
necessarily negative for all concerned as Mazur (1973), for example suggests because of a potential lack of ‘genuine’ intimacy. Rather, by these examples I aim to spotlight ways in which fidelity to dyadic containment is acted out and preserved – as a matter of re-assuring pleasure and ethics - even when sexual excess is entertained. Stepping outside the confines of ‘home’ to gain sexual pleasure but also averting emotional slippage to maintain the comfortable balance of two, ‘at the end of the day’ these relationships retreat back inside to dyadic normality: ‘When it’s all finished it’s back to normal’ (Brian), ‘you walk out of that bedroom […] and it’s just her and I’ (Rodney).

Samantha is Rodney’s partner and talks about their non-monogamy in a rather different way. Her response is in reply to being asked why a non-monogamy that must always involve both partners being present is preferable for her.

_Samantha [B/NM1]: ‘Cause you’re sharing life and so that’s what you’re doing when you’re with someone else together. You’re sharing that sexual experience together. If you’re doing it by yourself it’s like, ‘Well, nu, it’s not really about us’._

Elsewhere in her interview Samantha talks about herself as preferring to not be entirely disengaged emotionally with the other women she and Rodney have sex with together and she does so with reference to a female sexuality that she constructs as requiring a degree of emotionality. While not positioning herself as a ‘lacking’ sexual subject (which for Hollway, 1989 is how women’s sexual identity is framed in the have-hold discourse), Samantha can be seen as drawing on a ‘have-hold’ (monogamous) discursive repertoire and its romantic rhetoric to make sense of and justify her particular version of non-monogamy. The practice is not about a sexual pleasure that depersonalises other people as it does for Rodney and Brian in their use of the male-sexual-drive repertoire, but is about a full sharing of life. Thus Samantha depicts sexual engagement with others as not being explicitly peripheral to the relationship (when done together) but as being ‘about’ it. The ‘excess’ of a non-monogamous

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8 Obviously non-monogamous relationships that allow for ‘secondary’ relationships do not necessarily practice this kind of emotional distancing. Ethan [H/NM2], for example, talks about himself and his partner as not seeing other sexual partners as ‘disembodied sexual organs’. For Ethan and Clare non-monogamy is an opportunity to develop intimate relationships with people (but, as seen in later analyses, not without tightened regulation of a partner). Peter [G/NM2] similarly talks of not treating others as ‘a sexual object’ but emphasises that this can ‘be a very shady area if they {third parties} tend to want to be attached’. Peter and Ryan manage this ‘shadiness’ by requiring whoever they are seeing to ‘be aware’ of the central dyad and thus not seek an equal form of attachment. So, then, a similar distancing takes place here not through a process of dehumanisation but via an initial telling or warning.
sexuality is not explicitly separated from the primary relationship but channelled back into it in a ‘sharing of life’ and dyadic containment is again reconfirmed. And this ‘sharing of life’ works to strongly superintend sexual activity, allowing a controlled for non-monogamy insofar as it remains a matter of, and for, the sharing of life and the ‘have-hold’ fidelity of togetherness.

What Brian, Rodney and Samantha draw on to describe and authorise their brands of non-monogamy are various (gendered) discursive repertoires that are fashioned and combined in such a way that non-monogamy is made acceptable to monogamous ideology. Thus whilst ostensibly subversive or radical ‘alternatives’ these emotionally monogamous but sexually ‘open’ relationships nevertheless do not challenge the dominant social order itself. An excess of sex and others is either kept peripheral to the contained couple or construed as being ‘about’ (good for) the relationship but in both accounts a non-monogamous excess is ethically controlled for against the privileged status of a continually reaffirmed dyadic containment and all this represents.

What has been demonstrated in this and other sections of this chapter is that ‘alternative’ relationships are ‘liberally’ fashioned against the socio-moral convention of a private and exclusive dyadic enclosure such that notions of ‘liberation’ are made suspect as the enabling convention is continually recreated and the traditional power relations of one-to-one coupledom sustained. The disciplinary power that comes with an ‘authentic’ relation of self and relationship to the conventional ‘truths’ of coupledom are ever present in the varied constructions and practices of sexual and emotional non-monogamy wherein adherence to the ‘monogamous’ tradition of dyadic containment is repeatedly demonstrated, authorised and moralised rather than challenged or ‘transformed’. These examples of what liberal-humanist theorists typically read as a ‘freedom from couple-closure’ has here been re-interpreted as remaining within the very constraint of dyadic closure.

5.8 Conclusion

This analysis concerned the metaphoric conceptualisation and privileging of a contained couple-exclusivity as a particular intelligibility of the couple domain, one that has emerged in accordance with the historic and ontological condition of totalised structures and substances
wherein the individual has come to view the world as a network of self and categorical containments. Within this structuralist ontology that which is made present as space and occupancy has, since the seventeenth century, been understood as an ‘essence’ (of selves and categories) that in its crucial and prescribed containment is effectively made certain, permanent, accountable and manageable (Nietzsche, 1887a; Foucault, 1970; Deleuze and Guattari, 1977). Upon the seventeenth century (liberalist) fabrication of an always present but uninhabitable ‘outer’ realm that is to be avoided, a central and inhabitable ‘inner’ realm is made necessary and produced as an organisational and regulatory principle (Derrida, 1976; Deleuze and Guattari, 1977). And so the very idea of couple-containment (like every other contained structure or substance be it of personhood, family or society, for example) is predicated on the a priori conceptualisation of a hostile, chaotic and superficial territory that is to be morally and ethically avoided. On this basis dyadic containment, as constructed in the extracts presented, takes on its warrant and disciplinary function as an action or policy that guards and protects an ‘inner essence’ or ‘truth’ of couples and that ensures its survival by combating, yet all the while effectively consolidating, a metaphoric ‘outside’. In the strivings for and in the assurances thought to be procured from this kind of combative survival and security (or mastery), relationships and the coupled-subject are both constituted and normalised as ‘ideally’ fixed, restrained, regular and consistent, with the very deployment of the ‘home’ of dyadic containment marking out and justifying the terms of this domesticating and welcomed restraint, regularity and consistency.

The discursive production and harbouring of dyadic ‘essence’ or truth was shown as being an effect of the typically deployed metaphors of house and home that are drawn on to signify and qualify this essence. And the construction and privilege of a topographical dyadic containment was seen as being largely conditional on the discursive spatialisations of dichotomised and differently coded spaces. The figurative spaces, categories, and hierarchal oppositions of presence-absence, inside-outside, depth-superficiality and order-chaos were shown to produce particular knowledges and power effects in relation to what is to be included in relationships (and there contained and organised) and what is to be excluded (to be avoided and guarded against). This series of dichotomised sectors are aligned and managed in such a way that the discursive practices of a centralised and contained dyad, and what it means to occupy and maintain this space, is made possible. That is, at the intersection and division of these metabolically drawn up spaces possibilities emerge for
how we experience ourselves and each other. And as the topographies of spaces are detailed and assigned differential status the ‘contained couple’ becomes a product of the political and discursive systemisation of order and control rather than the product of a psychologically warranted or ‘natural’ phenomenon.

In being so ‘contained’, monogamous relationships were seen to construct a form of dyadic closure that works to block off, shut down and prohibit excess, while in sexually/emotionally non-monogamous relationships that are similarly constructed as being ‘contained’, a form of dyadic enclosure emerges that allows for (a limited) excess while simultaneously protecting and consolidating a dyadic inner-essence. Significantly, both configurations of couple-containment function to authorise the practices of exclusivity and exclusion as well as to authenticate and normalise relationships and subjects in their containments. In their fidelity to dyadic containment it was argued that non-monogamous and ‘open’ relationships do not pose any serious challenge to the orthodoxy of coupledom as suggested by the ‘liberationist’ theorists of liberal-humanism from the 1970s to the present. Rather dyadic closure was seen as being the very condition upon which the processes, strategies and technologies for a freedom-from-closure are brought about. Alternative relational practices as spoken of in the extracts presented do not, therefore, deprive the traditional power relations of coupledom the opportunity to reproduce themselves. To suggest, however, that the normative power relations of the couple matrix are the enabling conditions for (and conspicuous in) ‘alternative’ configurations of relationships and forms of relational ‘freedom’ and ‘change’ is not to imply that power and liberation are, or even can be, mutually exclusive forces (see Foucault, 1973a, 1977a, 1978a; Minson, 1986; Butler, 1990; Knights and Vurdubakis, 1994; Rose, 1999). Rather in this and subsequent chapters, the basis of my critique of the reproduction of hetero-normativity in ‘alternative’ relationships and the literature that celebrates the freedoms assumed to be involved, is that ‘freedom’ is indeed presumed to be independent from power and control such that a polarised and utopian view of ‘freedom’ is perpetuated, ‘authenticity’ of an agentic and pre-given subject is privileged, and power is essentialised as being possessed by some and not others. Thus a socio-historically specific knowledge of ‘alternative’ relationships, as much as conventional ones, needs to be explored in the context of the power relations that make it possible and in which it is deployed rather than seeing it in terms of abstract and ahistorical notions of ‘freedom’ and human capacity (Foucault, 1978a).
However way exclusivity is practiced, in an across context ‘containment’ coupled-subjects and partnerships are moved toward a particular relation to truth that serves to assure the certainty and permanence of these ‘essences’. Thus the metaphoric and ontological construct of ‘monogamous’ containment, as suggested above, serves as a forceful discursive mechanism for regulation and control insofar as relationships are constituted and reified as contained structures (of house and home) that are demarcated from a threatening ‘outside’ and so continued occupancy of a normalising but discursively constituted ‘inside’ is made imperative. In this the individual-society dichotomy can be seen as being re-articulated as a relationship-society dichotomy with relationships, like the ‘individual’, being totalised and gaining their relative value in the process. As such, I have argued that it is necessary to question the taken-for-granted ‘realities’ of inner and outer spaces that the rhetoric of coupledom draws up and confirms and to deconstruct the centralised ‘essence’ of dyadic containment as a discursive fiction with very ‘real’ effects.

In the following chapter the related themes of ‘containment’ (as both ‘closure’ and ‘enclosure’), ‘constancy’ and ‘authenticity’ are further explored in relation to the couple-qualities of commitment and trust – dyadic practices that work to establish, confirm, and police couples and their allowed for trajectories. And the critique of ‘liberated’ relationships will be further developed as a non-monogamous ‘freedom-from-contract’ is deconstructed.
CHAPTER SIX

Discourse Analysis II

Practices of freedom, contract and trust

“The process of falling in love and marrying, as many writers have described it, is akin to the gravitation of astral bodies. Two persons meet and fall into one another’s orbits and then all reluctantly continue to swing about one another forever.”

William Waller (1938: 213)

“The involvement of individuals in determining the conditions of their association – this statement exemplifies the ideals of the pure relationship.”

Anthony Giddens (1992: 190)

6.1 Introduction

In the literature review of chapter two the inter-related qualities of ‘commitment’ and ‘trust’ were seen as being advanced by the discipline of psychology as crucial components for relationship stability and success with both components requiring ongoing maintenance and effective management. Predominantly theorised as coherent, unitary qualities, each with their own inherent value and properties, commitment and trust are psychologised as attitudes, traits and beliefs that can allegedly be isolated, observed and measured (see Cramer, 1998; Hendrick, 2004; also Fletcher et al, 2000). And this measurement typically involves plotting participant’s responses on standardised self-report scales of weak to strong, with ‘strong’ representing an individual’s and a couple’s ‘full capacity’ to responsibly demonstrate either practice and thus effectively manage a relationship (e.g. Adams and Jones, 1997; Rempel et al, 1985). The following analysis of the two relational principles takes a different tack. Like the hegemonic imperative of an exclusive dyadic containment, the qualities of commitment and trust are reinterpreted as discursively constituted practices that are made manifest not by the simple enactment and demonstration of their fuller, stronger forms, but by a series of enabling socio-historic conditions involving economic, political, cultural and linguistic
compulsions. Specifically, commitment and trust are conceptualised here as two further interconnected grids of intelligibility and relays of productive/disciplinary power by which coupledom and couple-subjectivity are brought into view, accessed, examined and stabilised as couples deploy these imperatives, and the various technologies they make available, to shape and regulate selves and experience in a particular relation to the idealised freedoms of a predictive ‘security’ and authenticating ‘truth’ of contemporary couple relationships.

In this chapter, then, I explore the various conditions, means, and disciplines of a subject’s relation to self, security, truth and relationship satisfaction (constituted as forms of freedom) that are believed to be brought about by the responsible demonstration of commitment and trust (e.g.; Rempel et al, 1985; Sabatelli, 1999; Rusbult et al, 2001). I aim to highlight the regulative conduits of self and relational enactments that are organised and made plausible in the solicitations of commitment and trust as further practices of a ‘freedom’ said (as above) to be realisable in (and necessary for) the fulfilsments of an ‘authentic’ and ‘secure’ relationship. It will be argued that in accounting for relationships and selves in terms of commitment and trust it is not genuinely ‘successful’, ‘stable’ or ‘authentic’ relationships or people that are produced so much as the means whereby couples and selves realise a ‘full capacity’ to self-govern and direct relationships (and themselves in relationships) toward ideologically predicated and politically construed forms of ‘truth’, normalised standards and covert forms of (self) discipline.

As with the previous chapter’s deconstruction of dyadic containment, commitment and trust as two further practices (and powers of) of freedom are problematised in terms of how their various ‘authenticities’, ‘securities’ and forms of ‘truth’ are constituted and what values, behaviours, normative patterns, and self-relational techniques are set in motion as a consequence. Thus, it is the secure ‘freedom’ of a promised future idealised as permanent, predictable and certain that commitment works to set up and trust guarantee and police that is to be troubled here in terms of the various power relations produced. I argue that in a socio-historically contingent and (neo)liberal ‘consciousness of power and freedom’ (Nietzsche, 1887a) as an enabling condition of commitment and trust, a certain relation to ‘truth’ and ‘security’ are produced wherein people, couples and their futures are required to remain responsibly calculable, regular, truthful and thereby governable. Furthermore, this analysis extends the previous chapter’s critique of a humanist ‘non-monogamous’ freedom
insofar as a neo-liberal ‘freedom’ from a monogamous, married-like contract (which I contrast with a monogamous freedom of contract) is no simple example of people self-determining the conditions of a revamped commitment and less coercive trust but that the ‘freedoms’, ‘maximum securities’, ‘reliabilities’, ‘truths’ and ‘right directions’ that participants give account of in constructions of commitment and trust work to produce ever more normalised and disciplined subjectivities and couple relationships. I begin this analysis with a discussion of the liberal subject who is entitled to make promises and vouch for futures in a culture of responsibilisation and securitisation as the enabling conditions for the imperatives and managements of commitment and trust.

6.2 A freedom of contract

In the second essay of his *Genealogy of Morals* (1887a) Nietzsche explores the (etymological) genealogy of ‘bad conscience’ in relation to the socio-economic contract between Debtor and Creditor and the power dynamics of this exchange. The essay opens with a brief discussion of “the breeding of an animal which is entitled to make promises” (ibid.: 39) and Nietzsche goes on to interpret this entitlement as an aspect of the privilege of responsibility by which the emergent ‘sovereign individual’ forms a “special consciousness of power and freedom” and the right to affirm him/herself (ibid.: 41).

“But how much all this presupposes! In order to dispose of the future in advance in this way, how much man must first have learnt to distinguish necessity from accident! To think in terms of causality, to see and anticipate from afar, to posit ends and means with certainty, to be able above all to reckon and calculate! For that to be the case, how much man himself must have become calculable, regular, necessary, even to his own mind … Such is the long history of responsibility.”

(Nietzsche, 1887a: 40; italics in original)

In the ability to make promises and vouch for a future - a capacity, he argues, that is commissioned and made necessary by a morality of responsibility (as determined by Christian aesthetics but which Foucault [1985] dates back to Greco-Roman antiquity), Nietzsche highlights the presupposition of a liberal subject who is first made necessary, regular, predictable, and consequently calculable as the conditions for autonomy, free will and social contract. We are able to measure and calculate, and thus promise our futures and
ourselves in them having already been measured as the kind of subject who is able and willing, but moreover free to do so. Nietzsche’s liberated, autonomous subject in possession of a ‘special consciousness’ of power and freedom comes to make promises as an act of ethical self-mastery, of self-discipline, and as a measure of one’s personal value (cf. Foucault, 1985, 1986). In this Nietzsche is arguing that the act of making promises and “disposing of the future in advance” is intricately linked to the liberalist construction of the free and equal subject who deploys an emergent entitlement to make promises as a means of asserting this ‘self’ in its equality and freedom. In other words, the entitlement to promise, this “power over oneself and over fate” (Nietzsche, 1887a: 41), is associated with the rise of the liberated and responsible subject who is enabled to possess and vouch for a future of one’s own making; one that is his (since the autonomous individual is ‘ideally’ masculine) to own, control and guarantee. In the act of promising and guaranteeing futures, then, the liberal individual vouches for himself as free, responsible, reliable and dependable. He asserts the right to (re)affirm himself in a consciousness of freedom and power over fate whereby one is constituted as – and required to remain – calculable and necessarily regular.

Furthermore, Nietzsche sees the practice of ‘responsible’ promising as being historically enacted in return for the advantages assumed to be afforded by liberal society. As such he further locates the entitlement to promise (and the beginnings of ‘responsibility’, ‘conscience’ and ‘security’) on the historic contractual relationship between creditor and debtor whereupon “one man first measured himself against another” (ibid.: 51; italics in original). Making promises and vouching for futures is thus related to an economy of exchange that requires one to give assurances, undertake some things, refrain from others and bestow benefit if this economy of exchange is to be effectively maintained. Promising is linked to an age old system of economic and contractual exchange which, for Nietzsche, takes on particular moral and political significance with the Enlightenment fiction of free and equal citizens who enter into the ‘social contract’, a term coined by Rousseau in 1762 following Hobbes’s (1651) initial formulation of the concept.

Further to the discussion in chapter one, social contract theory (see Lessnoff, 1990) advances the classical liberalist ethos that a person’s moral and political obligations are dependent on a contract or agreement between them to form society. It stipulates, among other things, that the keeping of promises is crucial to the upkeep of justice and the social
fabric, thereby framing the keeping of promises (pacts, bonds or covenants) as an essential moral duty (Hobbes, 1651). According to the political precepts of the social contract such moral duty, like the sovereign power appointed to regulate it, is legitimised on the explicit basis that humankind is born free and is driven to maintain that ‘natural freedom’ by handing it over to authoritative control and the security this is assumed to guarantee (Lessnoff, 1990). Making promises and entering into contract with others and the State is therefore theorised as a necessary pre-condition of freedom. It is a freedom of contract, a form of liberty that comes with being contracted to duty, responsibility, equality and justice such that we “obtain some future apparent good” and assure ourselves a “contented life” (Hobbes, 1651; cited in Lessnoff, 1990: 52). Obedience to the law and morality via contract is made a matter of liberty. Such is the fundamental ethos of liberalist politics as Hobbes framed it in the seventeenth century: that we see ourselves as ‘free’ subjects motivated to assure the ‘contented life’ by entering into a social contract and responsibly promising to abide by it in order to protect that assumed freedom. “The achievement of the liberal arts of government”, as Rose (1999: 69) points out, “was to begin to govern through making people free.”

One of the consequences, then, of the highly influential social contract theory is that it confirmed the individual as rational contractor where one’s alleged freedom, independence and equality are made a matter, and consequence, of entering into voluntary contract with moral duty and political authority. But, as Nietzsche argues, contractual dependence does not result in undiminished freedom and security but establishes power relations between ‘debtor’ (the liberal subject who is ‘made free’ and therefore indebted) and ‘creditor’ (the political and moral authority that guarantees that freedom). Being entitled to enter into contracts, commit oneself to a line of action, and make promises as a liberated, rational and responsible subject is not without the coercive presence of religious, economic and judicial powers that authorise a particular (and politically conducive) moral code, version of ‘freedom’ and sense of justice as ‘immutable and eternal’, that prescribe and sanction the upkeep of certain covenants, and which rule “by the terror of some punishment” should they be breached (Hobbes, 1651; cited in Lessnoff, 1990: 58). Thus, as it has been argued, “we can begin to understand freedom not simply as an abstract ideal but as material, technical, practical, [and] governmental” (Rose, 1999: 63).
As I go on to explore through the following analysis of participants’ accounts of their relationships, in that the liberal subject endowed with a capacity to make promises projects a calculated and predictable regularity of self and future as Nietzsche suggests, the act of ‘committing’ in couple relationships - itself a form of promise and social contract - is not without the operation of productive and disciplinary power. It comes tied to a moral/ethical entitlement to make promises, to the assumption of freedom and to the modes of self-affirmation, self-discipline, and ‘good conscience’ this freedom both warrants and produces. Such capabilities mobilised by an entitlement to promise are clearly reflected in constructions of couple commitment.

Tyler \(\text{H/NM2/ND}\): For me commitment is […] a promise of what’s going to happen in the future.

Samantha \(\text{B/NM1}\): Commitment. Being able to kind of, I guess say ‘Yeah, this is what I want’. Making that decision I guess.

Ethan \(\text{H/NM2}\): Um, commitment is (.) kind of like saying that whatever you’re committing to you’ve got to follow through on.

Clare \(\text{H/NM2}\): I’m far more aware of it as a commitment ‘cause it’s free choice. It’s totally free choice.

In these extracts couple commitment is discursively constructed as a calculated, individualised promise and decision/choice about a future with a partner. For Tyler the promise of commitment serves to determine what will happen in the future and make it certain. Indeed, the etymological (Latin) basis of the verb ‘to commit’, as with the act of ‘contracting’, involves the idea of being ‘sent forth’ into a future or foreign land. From the Latin miss (meaning ‘send’) as the etymological basis of ‘commit’, the word ‘mission’ (as a civilising task or goal) is also derived. Thus the act of ‘committing’ can be seen as being associated with the notion of being sent forth into an unknown future with the particular task or goal of organising and civilising that future. According to Ethan’s account, the promise or decision of commitment also requires or obliges one to ‘follow through’ on the projections made. As illustrated in extracts presented later in this chapter, ‘following through’ is seen to involve certain adherences and agreements that are carried out with missionary zeal as one is ‘sent forth’ to organise and make certain a promised future as an exercise of freedom.
So with the seeming capacity to see into and determine a future in this way the subject who promises and contracts is also made a moral-ethical agent assumed to possess, at least potentially, the necessary skills, discipline and conscience to ‘follow through’ on a promise, decision or choice and make that future happen. As noted above, behind these future projections is the assumption of a rational, liberated and desiring subject who is able to know what he/she wants and make a promise/decision as an act of ‘free choice’. It is by fictioning commitment as a ‘free choice’ that is hers to make and own that Clare is made positively ‘aware’ of her commitment (or contract) to Ethan and self-aware of herself as a free agent in this contract. Thus, applying a Nietzschean perspective as outlined above, the entitlement (and duty) to commit to a relationship and a future with another is predicated on the fiction of an individual who has an ability to make promises, decisions and choices about a future which in turn presumes, and produces, a subject who is aware of themselves as rational, calculating, responsible and free.

It is important, I suggest, to flag up the political and subjective conditions of an entitlement to promise futures and commit (and expect this in ‘trusted’ others) because these have direct bearing on why and how both commitment and trust can and should be enacted, organised, and adhered to as a matter of ‘good conscience’, personal ‘worth’ and individual ‘freedom’. This liberalist entitlement to promise and enact a particular future by way of a committed relationship is an ability one must foster and is a capacity one must assert in order to know oneself as a ‘free’ agent who responsibly assures one’s own security and contentment (Lessnoff, 1990). In subsequent sections, then, I attend to ways in which commitment as an enactment of contract is variously constructed and played out in differently ‘committed’ couples and the regulative power of these discursive constructions and enactments. The next section concerns the more formal commitment of a marriage contract and a ‘freedom of contract’. This is then compared with constructions of an allegedly less formal commitment that involves no such legalistic contract as a manual and guarantee for the future of a relationship but which, I argue, is no less regulative in its productivity of a ‘freedom from contract’.
6.3 Commitment as progressive journey

Marianne and Ken were to be married two months after being interviewed and so appear very clear about their ideals, hopes and plans in relation to it.

*Marianne [H/M]:* We’re committed ‘cause we’re getting married with vows and everything. You’re giving yourself to someone and they’re giving themselves to you and hopefully that will be it for the rest of my life. To share all that intimacy with just one person. /MF: mm / And that’s hopefully what I’ll be able to do, well what I’m planning to do anyway. And hopefully he can do the same […] Um, it just seems like the next step in our journey […] It’s all just fallen into place.

*Ken [H/M]:* Um, marriage. Well that’s probably, well it is the biggest commitment you can make in a relationship is to get married which is what we’ve done […] It had been leading up to it. Ar, evolution. The next step. / MF: mm mm / And the biggest step and the most important. And ar, you know, it’s s’posed to be forever. It’s just the natural progression of a relationship. / MF: mm / And for me, um, I guess it makes it all final. You know? That’s it.

*MF:* And you like all that / K: yeah, yeah / formality and finality?

*Ken:* Yeah. It gives me a sense of security and ar, safety I guess. Yeah, comfort or whatever. Yeah, contentment.

These extracts exhibit the conventional, romanticised construction of marriage (and coupledom) as ideally monogamous and permanent (Hollway, 1989; Lawes, 1999). In getting married Marianne and Ken are embarking on ‘the biggest commitment you can make in a relationship’; a commitment that is formalised and it’s supposed ‘forever’ assured by the vows and contract of marriage. By virtue of this judicial-moral contract, infused with the obligations of exclusivity and a prevaricated (‘hoped for’) permanence, this couple are bound to a certain course of future action. As in Lawes’s (1999) analysis of the discursive nature of marriage, commitment is here constructed as an event in being anchored to a wedding as the point of entering into a contract. And this event is depicted as a crucial stage in the relationship which in turn is constructed as a naturally unfolding process. The desired and anticipated end in being ‘sent forth’ into a relational future by way of a contract and the event of marriage is the same for both narrators. This couple give an account of themselves as emotionally, physically, and morally contracted to each other in an intimate and permanent exclusivity that, according to Ken (and reflecting social contract theory), will afford a sense of (a freedom) of security, comfort and contentment. In both social contract theory and Ken’s extract, consignment of particular obligations and responsibilities is desired
in anticipation of personal delivery into the freedom of a permanent and secure safekeeping. Such are the romanticised and idealised terms of the contract of marriage as constructed here. Commitment and the future it organises are made final and sealed by way of a contract and the exchange of vows that, in these extracts, involve non-negotiable terms and pre-prescribed benefits. For Marianne in particular, the contract of marriage, as with the social contract, requires a ‘giving’ or handing over of oneself to an idealised future, moral/ethical authority and a specific behavioural code. It mobilises the principles of containment, constancy and (a prevaricated) permanence as the ‘duty’ of monogamy and the ‘right’ to expect or hope for it in a partner.

In these ways the precepts of the social contract and its construal of freedom resonate in constructions of marriage and relational commitment. That we ‘commit’ to another as a practice of (securitised) freedom is the discursive conditions of seventeenth and eighteenth century contractarian thought and an Enlightenment politics that rationalised the ruling principles of self-government and self-regulation as demonstrations of freedom (Foucault, 1978b). Thus as we promise a future with another and commit to it as an act of freedom, whether in marriage or not, we are complicit in individually and mutually governing who we are, our desires, affiliations, how we live our futures and are intimately bound (voluntarily) to the power relations, to the socially sanctioned and politically conducive lines of action and ‘normative’ standards that a contractual notion of freedom sets up and legitimises. As Rose (1989) argues, a freedom to choose and an obligation to be free, one that in these extracts is explicitly tied to voluntarily entering into contract with another, is not without the irony of being ‘free’ under pre-existing, moralised conditions of limitations and the ‘inevitability’ of ‘natural progression’.

“[T]he forms of freedom we inhabit today are intrinsically bound to a regime of subjectification in which subjects are not merely ‘free to choose’ but obliged to be free, to understand and enact their lives in terms of choice under conditions that systematically limit the capacities of so many to shape their own destinies.”

(Rose, 1996a: 11)

Significant to the above extracts are the sequence metaphors they involve and which can be read as limiting the capacities of Marianne and Ken to shape their own destiny together. Talk of ‘the next step’, ‘journey’, ‘evolution’, ‘natural progression’ and things ‘falling into place’
depict a committed relationship as inevitably and naturally progressing from one level to the next until it reaches its pinnacle of marriage. In envisaging a married future with her partner Tricia likewise articulates a sequential journey that includes growing old together, having a house and children and a hoped for, but again prevaricated monogamous inevitability.

Tricia [H/M]: I'm envisaging being with him, us being old together, having a house and having kids with him. And yeah, going through a next level.

MF: And monogamy will remain / T: oh yeah / a part of that package as far as you're concerned?

Tricia: Yep. Yep. Well hopefully so, well definitely for me, but you know, oh God.

In this linear progression towards a peak everything pans out either according to plan or as hoped for. Thus a relationship (one made final by the commitment of marriage) is being constructed rather like a journey replete with pre-ordained hopes, routes, plans and sequential eventualities and involves an ironic tension between a ‘natural inevitability’ that is simultaneously construed as ‘freely’ chosen. In drawing on the interpretive resource of contracted marriage as a means of understanding and consolidating relational commitment Ken, in particular, positions himself as a passive spectator, as a reader and follower of maps who is able to survey from afar the preordained future.

The etymological roots of ‘commitment’ and ‘contract’ as a missionary-like sending and going forth is apparent in these extracts in that Marianne and Ken construct their immanent marriage as a crucial stage in their relational journey and as a form of contract that will organise and civilise its future, and them in it. In existing qualitative analyses of ways in which people describe and construct their couple relationships, ‘relationship as journey’ has been cited as a dominant conceptual metaphor (Quinn, 1987; Owen, 1990; Baxter, 1992). Here researchers report partners as talking about marriage as like following a path which may involve stops and starts, potholes and detours (Quinn, 1987). After the construction of relationship as ‘work’ (picked up on below), Baxter (1992) reports the ‘journey of discovery’ metaphor as the second most common metaphor used by her respondents (appearing in 57.5 per cent of her interviews). Unlike Baxter’s research, however, where the ‘journey’ metaphor is interpreted as involving perpetual discovery in its emphasis on change and movement, the image of a sequential journey in these extracts emphasises inevitability. There is not so much the notion of discovery as Marianne, Ken and Tricia talk about their relationships in terms
of marriage but an emphasis on predestination and inevitability. While this configuration of the ‘journey’ metaphor may be particularly appropriate to Marianne and Ken who are just about to be married, the conception of a committed relationship as a progressive journey or path here functions to reduce uncertainty and enable predictability rather than maximise these, as Baxter (1992) suggests. Like the subject of social contract theory, these contracted participants are on an evolutionary journey towards certainty and finality rather than open-endedness and discovery. As a ‘natural progression’ the journey is not theirs to negotiate, improvise or make up along the way but to passively engage in as its culturally determined (but naturalised) inevitabilities unfold.

Thus Baxter’s (1992) suggestion that couples on a ‘journey’ tend to see an unpredictable and an ‘ad hoc’ relationship style as important overlooks ways in which the non-negotiable contract of marriage, as illustrated here, can intersect with the journey metaphor to map out a path of ‘natural’ inevitability and progression. This relational and committed to journey and trajectory is not embarked on independently from what it means to be morally and ethically ‘contracted’ to a socially constructed and authorised predestination in being monogamously married.

One other metaphoric relationship trajectory that is more in line with Baxter’s notion of relationship fluidity can be seen as being made available by the alternative construction of commitment as a ‘negotiated agreement’ that is construed as a flexible form of (non-married) contract. But in regards to this construction what one can interpret as an improvisational approach to commitment and relationship future can equally be interpreted as an improvisation that is enabled and restricted by a neo-liberal twist of governance that privileges not a ‘freedom of contract’ but a ‘freedom from contract’ and the tightened forms of regulations this non-contracted ‘freedom’ produces. In this neo version of liberalism ‘freedom’ moves from the legality, morality and obligation of contract to a freedom which assumes the right of the individual to organise their affairs according to personal, non-legal bonds and covenants (Giddens, 1992; Rose, 1999).
6.4 A freedom from contract

In his book on the ‘transformation of intimacy’, Giddens (1992) proposes the argument that new terminologies of relationship ‘commitment’ are allied with the twentieth century trend towards the negotiation of newer, freer and less legalistic couple relationships. According to the redemptive humanism of Giddens the relatively recent practice of a non-conjugal, democratic ‘commitment’ by the ‘modern’ couple supposedly reflects a cultural move away from the constraint of legal contract as a ‘bill of rights’ to a commitment Giddens talks about as hinging on flexible and negotiated engagement by virtue of a ‘rolling contract’.

Given the alleged freedom to make less rigid, less oppressive choices about identity and monogamous commitments, ‘modern’ non-contracted relationships are theorised as a site for the negotiations of self-invention and alternative lifestyles (Giddens, 1992; Weeks, 2000; Weeks et al, 2001; Weeks, 2004; Jackson and Scott, 2004). In this liberal-humanist perspective (see also chapters two and five), gays and lesbians in particular are applauded for inventing a “democratised, flexible model of couple relationships” (Weeks et al, 2001: 109; cf. Blumstein and Schwartz, 1983). More recently, and in a similar vein, Bauman (2003) writes of semi-detached couples in a ‘liquid’ society who are conceiving their ‘top-pocket’ relationships as upgradeable and commitment as no contract but as a temporary arrangement. (‘Top-pocket’ relationships are so called because they can be brought out as necessary and discarded at will.)

In accounting for their non-monogamous relationships (those that are both open and closed to secondary relationships), participants frequently express this kind of neo-liberal freedom-from-contract and celebrate the democratic, individually organised and no rules flexibility it allegedly offers.

*Peter [G/NM2]*: We didn’t make any grand plans but played it one step at a time. Bit more of a constant negotiation /MF: mm mm / instead of like ‘Oh okay, the rulebook says that by the third date we should be checking out China patterns.

*MF:* Are there any particular ways that you think commitment is best demonstrated? *Christine [L/NM2]*: No, I think it’s an individual thing.

*Samantha [B/NM1]*: Marriage and romance and all that is nice and it’s all fantastic but it’s, you shouldn’t have rules for the sake of, you know, what society says or
someone else says. Yeah, I think it puts a lot of strain on people by saying that one person should be with one person forever, I mean who says that and why is that true, kind of thing?

_Clarie [H/NM2]_: The commitment’s much more present as a commitment and um, not as an expectation.

Contributing to a therapeutic culture and, in this, facilitating the power of governance through supposed acts of liberty and self-development with are already intimately tied to socio-politically produced ‘technologies of the self’ (Foucault, 1988; Rose, 1996b, 1989) which we “act upon our bodies, souls, thoughts and conduct in order to achieve happiness, wisdom, health, fulfillment” (Rose, 1989: 11) and ‘freedom’, liberal humanist theorists such as those cited above propagate a particular and naive view of ‘freedom’ in asserting that the individual is free to realise his or her own potential and shape a more ‘workable’ lifestyle for themselves. Accordingly, the sociologically identified trend of ‘aversion to marriage and commitment’ is celebrated by liberal-humanist theorists as an indication of a greater social and personal liberty said to follow from a new individualism and a new cultural ideal of romantic love (e.g. Giddens, 1992). Yet in such a celebration certain assumptions are made that should be problematised in a critical exegesis of the ‘freedoms’ of modern, non-legalistic forms of commitment. Lawes (1999), for example, is critical of the aversion to marriage and commitment perspective in that it assumes, while it also consolidates, ‘accurate’ and comprehensive understandings of what marriage and commitment ‘really are’. On this assumed understanding of what traditional marriage really is, ‘realities’ can then be talked about as being redundant, resisted and/or transformed. Furthermore, for Lawes the “sociological treatments of marriage as something which ‘Generation X’ has devalued or altogether dispensed with” (ibid.: 16) cannot readily explain the emphasis that her (mainly heterosexual) participants place on conventional practices of commitment, security and ‘working’ at one’s relationship.

This paradox and discursive tension apparent in an ostensible ‘aversion’ to marriage and contracted commitment in the ‘flexible’ relationships of ‘modernity’ is illustrated by further extracts from the interviews conducted with the above participants who espouse a free and democratic, no rules commitment. For example, having accounted for her commitment as not an expectation, Clare goes on to make the particular expectations of a ‘working’ relationship, self sacrifice, and the ‘right’ of mutual regulation very explicit.
Clare: So the fundamental commitment is that I'm never going to do anything that doesn't work for you. And you're never going to do anything that doesn't work for me. So in other words we put each other above our own inclinations and desires.

Similarly, having rejected the rules of marriage and romance, Samantha clearly embraces the rules of a married-like, romantic commitment and its associated rights (how she expects to feel) and obligations (what another is expected to provide) when talking about feeling secure in a trusted relationship.

MF: What's feeling secure for you?
Samantha: Um, feeling I guess that they {a partner} love you and that you're number one. You know? At the end of the day it's you that they're going to be with and want to be with and that kind of thing.

The contractual, non-negotiable bill of rights that Giddens (1992), for example, argues is absent in the new twentieth century terminologies and practices of couple-commitment is explicitly present in these accounts from non-monogamous participants who simultaneously emphasise a 'liberated' commitment. As Lawes (1999) suggests, the aversion to marriage and commitment perspective does not readily explain the re-articulation and re-production of traditional relational values such as dyadic exclusivity by those who, like Clare and Samantha, purportedly reject them.

In regards to the lesbian and gay innovation of ‘new’ relationships, Worth et al (2002) are also sceptical of the aversion to marriage and commitment perspective. In their qualitative analysis of love, trust and monogamy in gay relationships, these authors oppose the optimistic notion that gay relationships are ‘free’, ‘open’ or unconventional in design and (sexual) practice, arguing instead that the dominant social institutions of monogamous marriage, romantic love, and ‘normative’ (heterosexual) masculinity are reproduced within these relationships. Worth et al make the point that same-sex relationships are not legally and socially sanctioned in the same way as opposite-sex couples are and so (sexual and/or emotional) monogamy becomes even more important as a point of reference in the absence of contract. In the previous chapter I made a similar point with regards to non-monogamous relationships more broadly and the (same and cross sex) non-monogamous emphasis on ‘emotional monogamy’ as a means of signifying relational containment and authenticity in
lieu of the conventional signifier of sexual fidelity. In the extracts above, the fidelities and power relations of self-sacrifice, dyadic containment and feeling ‘number one’ are reproduced in ‘alternative’ relationships because the usual (romantic) technologies and demonstrations of relational and subjective ‘authenticity’ and ‘truth’ remain hegemonic and are themselves not reconfigured.

In what follows I develop this line of argument insofar as ‘alternative’ relationships can be seen to utilise particular ways of guaranteeing and consolidating the traditional values of a committed exclusivity and permanence in an alleged aversion to tradition where a freedom-from-contract regulates in ever more acute and penetrative ways. I go on to extend the existing critique of the ‘aversion to marriage and commitment’ perspective by outlining something of the socio-political conditions and tenets of this so-called aversion and the associated ‘revolution’ or ‘new patterns’ in intimate relationships (e.g. Giddens, 1992; Plummer, 1995). My argument is that rather than reflecting a spontaneous cultural or social shift that can be understood on its own terms, this ‘revolution’ of coupledom is fostered by a particular practice of government and can be understood as a technology, tactic or resource whereby the ‘modern’ individual enacts his and her own regulation and self-discipline in the name of a ‘freedom’ that remains tied to a culturally sanctioned and normalised set of self-disciplines and ‘norms’ of securitisation (Rose, 1989, 1999).

Working with Foucault’s theory of governmentality, Rose (1999) writes of a “new way of understanding and acting upon individuals as subjects of freedom”. (ibid.: 84; cf. Foucault, 1978b; Burchell et al, 1991; Gordon et al, 1991; Barry et al, 1996). The current strategies for governing autonomous individuals through their freedom are associated with the political rationality of late capitalism or neo-liberalism or advanced liberalism, as Rose refers to it. To briefly recapitulate the discussion of neo-liberalism in chapter one, by the 1980s the political philosophy of neo-liberalism can be said to have firmly emerged in the Western world as a related, yet distinct, version of the classic liberalism that gave rise to it. However, as Rose emphasises, it is important not to think of classic liberalism as being superseded or effaced but to see neo-liberalism as a “complexification” or “hybridisation of techniques” of government (Rose, 1999: 142). On the one hand there are continuities between these two philosophies of government. The ethos of neo-liberalism encompasses many of the major principles of the liberalism of Enlightenment politics such as autonomy, responsibility, self-
government, private over public ownership, and practices of freedom. In this shared concern for the practices of freedom as a formula of rule, however, the two technologies of government also differ. Neo-liberalism grants a superiority not to the idea of the authoritative social contract and the patterned, organised, and constrained ‘order’ this prescribes, but fosters instead a self-governed order predicated on a freedom that is conceived of as autonomy of action, choice and a freedom from contract and constraint such as the subjects of ‘liberal’ relationships express and prioritise them in earlier quotes (pages 183-4).

Freedom, then, from this perspective, is achieved not by a contractual self-constraint, moral obedience or mutual ties and dependence either to others (as in the extracts from Ken and Marianne, page 179) or the State, but “is seen as the capacity to realize one’s desires in one’s secular life, to fulfil one’s potential through one’s own endeavours, to determine the course of one’s own existence through acts of choice” (Rose, 1999: 84; italics added). “All aspects of social behaviour are now reconceptualized along economic lines – as calculative actions undertaken through the universal human faculty of choice” (ibid.: 141). Choice, then, is to be enacted in order to become the ‘free’ subject of advanced liberalism and it is the duty of the neo-liberal state to enable and foster these choices (Barry et al, 1996). In previous extracts (pages 183-4) such choice is constituted by the (alleged) rejection of rulebooks, social expectation and relational convention, and in privileging negotiation and the right of the individual. Significant to the enactment of choice, it is not the social contract but the subject itself who has become the “essential object, target, and resource for certain strategies, tactics, and procedures for regulation” (Rose, 1996a: 152) as choice is freely made yet not without socio-political intervention and control in terms of what kinds of choices are knowable and authorised (Foucault, 1978b). In above extracts (pages 183-4) participants clearly express the right and freedom of the neo-liberal entrepreneur who is averse to contractual inflexibility for the sake of questionable rules and able to reject marital tradition. Samantha and Peter in particular question the rules of marriage and the truth of an inevitable ‘forever’ and pathway and in so doing position themselves as free agents who can reject the norms and constraints of tradition. Theirs is a position that liberal-humanist discourse propagates and legitimates as revolutionary, democratic and innovative. But this ability to reject tradition sets up the possibility, indeed the requirement, to follow a ‘better’ path or adopt a new, negotiable way
of relating – a path which, I will argue, is not itself without a set of rules and regulations packaged as free choice and sold as tools for an all-improved life and sense of self.

In terms of personal ethics, the vision of neo-liberalism is that every individual is an entrepreneur to be given a free range to manage his or her own life and manage it accordingly such that “the whole ensemble of individual life is to be structured as the pursuit of a range of different enterprises” (Gordon et al, 1991: 41). With this emphasis on an entrepreneurial freedom to manage, the individual is a self-managing, self-controlling subject bound to the permanent project of self-development and self-maximisation. In advanced forms of liberalism intent on maximising self-government, liberty and personal responsibility, the heroic entrepreneur is granted an “absolute reign of flexibility” (Bourdieu, 1998). In an economically driven social domain this flexibility is played out, among other things, in terms of greater choice and increased consumption, fixed-term work contracts, market flexibility, and socio-economic mobility (Bourdieu, 1998; Birrell et al, 2004). For the economic-rational subject of neo-liberalism, the future is not so much his or hers to passively survey or promise by way of an inflexible, legalistic contract but is theirs to control via the establishment of an array of choices, personal objectives and evaluations that themselves are not independent from political authority and the operation of power. Despite this philosophy of deregulation, however, intervention and regulation are not absent in a neo-liberalist ideology (Burchell et al, 1991; Rose, 1999; Moran, 2003). The regulation or formula for rule of neo-liberalism operates at the level of people’s attempts at self-improvement and their ascribed ability to choose such that the subject is complicit in his/her own regulation by making the ‘right’ or ‘better’ choice as socially and politically determined. As will be further demonstrated in the next chapter, in our attempts at self-improvement and by adopting the prescribed choices and means to achieve this, we adopt the regulative functions of government and are, therefore, ruled by choice. In short, the power of neo-liberalism is that we come to recognise ourselves and know ourselves as ‘free’ in the very practices that govern us (Stephenson, 2003).

In light of this we can interpret the aversion to commitment argument (as we can the sexual liberation and open marriage literature discussed in the previous chapter) as the social scientific empowerment of entrepreneurial subjects of choice and the political ‘commercialisation of intimate life’ (Hochschild, 2003) with its rhetoric of consumer
sovereignty, market reasoning and productive management. As such, the freedom-from-contract trend has political significance in being tied to a certain practice and problem of government and in formulating a mode of relating and ‘doing commitment’ that make the power effects of neo-liberalism as a regime of subjectification possible. The aversion to commitment perspective facilities the representation and regulation of coupledom as no longer, or not merely, conforming to the morality and constraint of an inflexible contract and its inevitable outcome but as a lifestyle decision that one can freely choose and self-manage in the endeavour to develop and fulfil oneself (e.g. Masters et al, 1982; Giddens, 1992; Weeks et al, 2001; Weeks, 2004; Jackson and Scott, 2004). Liberal-humanist research and theorising thus reflects and reinforces a specific form of government whose manipulations of what it is to be ‘free’ and ‘secure’ determines and regulates the ‘choices’ we make and the relational practices we adopt. That is to say, power operates in this ‘expert’ knowledge of the psy-disciplines (Foucault, 1973a; Rose, 1985). As our aspirations, affirmations, and experiences are ‘understood’ and tabled by the psy-disciplines they can be translated and manipulated into forms of regulation as the positions we must adopt (or reject) in order to be ‘free’ and ‘fulfilled’ are confirmed (Stephenson, 2003).

6.5 Commitment as negotiated agreement

In section 6.3 I drew attention to a relationship future as being organised and guaranteed by virtue of the metaphorical logic of a contracted and naturally unfolding ‘journey’. For Marianne and Ken the promised future is to be assured – while also drawn up by the legalistic vows of marriage and the ‘event’ of commitment. The security and contentment Ken predicts for himself were seen to be the consequences of a freedom that comes with entering into the non-negotiable, contracted and legal bond of marriage and the surety and finality this represents for him. In contrast to this depiction of commitment, the following three extracts, like those presented earlier (pages 183-4), construct a ‘negotiable’ commitment as appropriated by non-monogamous relationships that allow for secondary relationships (NM2).

Peter [G/NM2]: Commitment’s something that mutual. Um, yes, I think there has to be some thread of growing together. And um, how you achieve that is something that you sort of negotiate.
Christine [L/NM2]: Well commitment, having commitment means that you um, it’s like an agreement. Um, a contract. / MF: mm / Um, so I guess when there’s a commitment there are some sort of, um, guess there are some rules. / MF: mm / Some agreements. Yeah, you have an agreement about (.) what that means. In terms of my relationship with Barbara, we have a commitment to stay together / MF: mm / and to work through any problems that crop up along the way. With the aim of staying together […] We don’t have monogamy. Our commitment is more about being honest and talking about things as they develop. It’s a commitment to the relationship.

Ethan [H/NM2]: So there’s this kind of like, well sort of agreement we have is that we’ll both work to have the relationship work. Both of us. And if something comes up that doesn’t work then we’ll talk about it. Setting up, setting it up […] It’s like setting up parameters so that if I stay inside these, if we stay inside these parameters, /MF: mm / then we know it’s going to work.

Articulating a notion of relationships as negotiable, Peter warrants commitment as a ‘thread’ between a couple to facilitate a ‘growing together’ that is not the automatic function of monogamy or a predetermined contract but achieved by a process of negotiation. Christine and Ethan talk about this process of negotiation as being like an agreement and as setting things up; a negotiation that prioritises a ‘working relationship’ over moral prohibitions and conditions. While these relationships maybe regarded as ‘innovative’ and ‘flexible’ (e.g. Giddens, 1992; Weeks et al, 2001; Jackson and Scott, 2004) in that participants see themselves as the responsible architects of their own rules, commitments, securities and futures, like Marianne and Ken (page 179) Christine articulates a finality reached ‘along the way’ of commitment; an aimed for permanence that is expressed as ‘staying together’. While the non-monogamous terms of a contract of commitment are talked about as being negotiated and agreed to, the assumption behind the negotiation and the ultimate purpose of this type of contract is to similarly project the relationship into a permanent, final, bounded and predictable couple-future that reinstalls politico-romantic notions of exclusive togetherness, constancy and containment as gauges of authenticity.

Notions of rules and parameters are rearticulated by Christine and Ethan with the explicit function of keeping an ‘open’ relationship in ‘working’ order – an order that is predicated on the pervasive inside-outside dichotomy as critiqued in the previous chapter and that, for Ethan, serves to help him and his partner (Clare) stay ‘inside’ the confines of couple-containment and thus keep the relationship ‘working’ along traditionally exclusive lines. The power relations and regulations of dyadic containment as highlighted in chapter five are,
then, reassimilated and reproduced in these constructions of negotiated commitment and an entrepreneurial freedom of choice is clearly dissipated while at the same time being the rationale and justification for the rules and parameters talked about as being established. Thus in these examples, the neo-liberal emphasis on ‘choice’ produces not a more fulfilling freedom or freedom-from-contract but an ideological dilemma (Billig et al, 1988) wherein both an assumed freedom and the power relations of tradition and contract simultaneously exist, as the following extracts further illustrate.

Christine \[L/NM2\]: [...] on one level like, you know, on a rational level I think it’s ridiculous, you know, you can’t love someone forever. And, you know, don’t believe in ‘meant to be’, but it’s just, that’s what it feels like.

Andrew: \[G/NM1/ND\]: Commitment. Mm. Interesting word. Commitment to me is where you feel that a person or persons you’re with is forever. Whether it’s actual or not is beside the point. That’s what it means.

‘On a rational level’, as she puts it, Christine rejects the conjugal contract of ‘forever’ and its romanticised ‘meant to be’ yet on an emotional level these principles are embraced as being what a re-negotiated commitment nevertheless ‘feels like’. The permanence and certainty of the marriage contract might here be rejected as an irrational romantic ideal but such values are at the same time warranted and psychologised as emotionally credible and appropriate. In both extracts the romantic ideal of a committed to ‘forever’ is constructed (and particularised) as a ‘feeling’ rather than a contracted and legally sanctioned journey. And as a personally owned feeling a sense of freedom is similarly injected into this aspiration of forever. While the romantic ethos and actuality of long-term commitment are minimised on the one hand (for Andrew whether commitment is ‘actual or not is beside the point’), on the other hand they are reappropriated as emotionally real and necessary. Thus a non-monogamous commitment gains its authority and power as emotion, even as fantasy, rather than by formal contract and legal obligation. ‘Forever’ must be wished for and worked towards even whilst it is simultaneously construed, at least implicitly, as perhaps unrealistic. As ‘realists’ who are at the same time ‘idealists’ (see Lawes, 1999) these participants construct non-monogamous and non-dyadic commitment not as entirely flexible but as involving an ‘ideological dilemma’ (Billig et al, 1988) between the assumed freedoms of the ‘real’ and ‘ideal’ – a dilemma and discursive contestation that is also evident in non-married monogamous accounts of commitment (as illustrated later in this chapter).
What I want to emphasise here is that in a ‘negotiable’ commitment the romantic and exclusive ideals of ‘forever’ and ‘meant to be’ seep back into a freedom-from-contract as inescapable emotions and ‘negotiation’ concerns the means to this end rather than the end itself. As Lawes (1999) points out, the sociological argument that marriage and traditional commitment are ‘dead’ overlooks the hegemony of the romantic discourse which, I suggest, works to revive the cultural norms of relational permanence, exclusivity and fidelity even in those unconventional or ‘realist’ relationships that are theorised (and talked about) as rejecting them. What Lawes calls the ‘idealist’ and ‘realist’ repertoires - two sets of resources on which we can draw to construct commitment and signify relationship authenticity and truth - are interdependent repertoires and not mutually exclusive or easily dichotomised in that “each seems to call the possibility of the other into play” (Lawes, 1999: 14). A ‘realist’ repertoire sceptical of ‘forever’ and ‘meant to be’, at least as actuality, draws on the very principles of the ‘idealist’ repertoire to authorise ‘workability’ and an emotional validity such that the romantic and contractual terms of a permanent exclusivity are reassimilated in these freedom-from-contract arrangements. In that the practice of commitment is hegemonically construed as an effect of the specification of need – primarily a need for the certainties and truths of containment and constancy – a so-called ‘transformed’ form of commitment is already limited because here the same needs and desires are being specified and aspired to.

6.6 In the ‘absence’ of sexual monogamy

‘We don’t have monogamy’, says Christine in the quote above (page 190), and this couple are not committed to such a contract but they are committed to ‘being honest and talking about things’ in an attempt to work at their relationship and master uncertainty and (sexual and emotional) non-containment so that relational stability is responsibly ensured. In non-monogamous relationships that are both emotionally exclusive (NM1) and not (NM2), Rodney and Ethan similarly emphasise the importance of honest truth-telling and open communication for relational success.

Rodney [H/NM1]: Um, I think a successful relationship stems from just being honest with each other. Um, setting limits. Knowing your limits. Um, definitely just being honest with each other I guess. You know? Have nothing to hide. Don’t hide anything from each other.
Ethan [H/NM2]: {A successful relationship} is being very open, um, in communication. I think the relationship that works is one where there aren’t any secrets [...] so each person knows exactly where the other person is and what they’re doing and what’s going on. /MF: mm/ So there’s never any kind of wonder. Never wondering about what’s going on for the other person. Always knowing and no surprises.

In these quotes, a no-secrets honesty and truthful communication are the privileged methods, and modes of regulation, for a successful relationship where ‘success’ is constituted as involving the setting up and knowing of ‘limits’ and, in Ethan’s account in particular, the continual and ‘no surprises’ monitoring of a partner that includes a full and exact knowledge of a partner’s every detail. In these accounts it is not a monitoring of, or truthful knowledge about, sexual conduct that guarantees and affirms relational success and authenticity. Rather it is an open and honest truth-telling that in lieu of sexual monogamy establishes and guarantees the limitation of conduct and action and which minimises surprise and wonder. And with this emphasis on an obligatory open and confessional truth-telling (by no means unique to, although intensified in non-monogamous relationships as illustrated in chapter seven) every detail, sexual and otherwise, of the (non)monogamous subject is made fully visible, accounted for, and thus regulated (see Foucault, 1978a; and chapter seven).

Thus in lieu of the contract of monogamy other forms of fidelity and regulation are at work in the guise of total honesty and truthful communication, for example. That the re-worked terms of this contract are centred on the ethical values of honesty and open communication (rather than the prohibitions of sexual morality) is, I would argue, no indication of a greater ‘freedom’ or a looser and less restrained obligation. Rather this substitution of morality with ethics (discussed further in chapter seven) can be interpreted as a tighter, more encompassing and penetrative form of contract as these relationship ‘innovators’ are compelled to enact a masterful and self-governed freedom that involves ‘honest’ self-declarations and constant examination in the production of a more thorough truth about themselves and their relationships (see Foucault, 1977d; 1978a). While the power relations and disciplines produced by the subjectifying and regulative technology of open and honest truth-telling in contemporary couple relationships are further discussed in the following chapter, what can be seen as occurring here is the displacement of monogamous sexual prohibition as the guarantee of relationship workability and authenticity by a compulsion to continually examine oneself, confess and monitor the ‘truth’ of another. In this active
production of supposed truth, disciplinary power is mobilised and can effectively thrive (Foucault, 1978a). In these “webs of knowledge and circuits of communication” (Rose, 1999: 147) a self-governing and self-disciplined subject is constituted, actions and relationships are shaped, conduct is steered, and an authenticating ‘truth’ is overseen. The freedom from the contract, rules and duties of traditional (monogamous) commitment which has allegedly inspired a revolution in couple relationships has, I argue, merely inspired new and more subtle technologies of self-governance that besides the imperative of truth-telling also involve the compulsion to ‘work’ at relationships.

Clare [H/NM2]: So we’re now {as a non-monogamous couple} building together and it’s that that nobody else can replace. That we are partners building something together, that’s, and I think that’s why a lot of people need monogamy, because they aren’t doing that. They aren’t actually partners. So they have to have monogamy cause what else have they got? They’re not actually working together to create anything.

In a marriage that was once sexually and emotionally monogamous, Clare now works at ‘building’ and ‘creating’ her relationship in lieu of its previous monogamy. In the absence of the contract of monogamy, around which she once made sense of her commitment, Clare constructs an exclusivity and authenticity that are also made possible and affirmed by the active labour of working and creating together (which again as relational technologies are not unique to, although in the case of this research are more frequently deployed in non-monogamous contexts). The marital contract, its assumption of monogamy and its mapping of an inevitable progression that one merely participates in (see quotes from Marianne, Ken and Tricia on page 179) is supplemented by the metaphor of building whereby Clare and her partner work together to ‘create’ their relationship and freely organise it outside of the obligations of conventional marriage. The permanence and exclusivity of this ‘freely’ arranged relationship are dependent on a commitment to build, work and create together and it is this masterful, self-affirming ‘creative labour’ which functions in her account to authenticate Clare’s relationship and to produce this dyad as ‘partners’. In that this active building together is marked as that which ‘nobody else can replace’, the romantic/monogamous ideal of couple-exclusivity, though discredited in this extract, again seeps back into and authorises this alleged freedom-from-contract.
In terms of negotiation and agreement there may be a neo-liberal freedom from contract implicit in these extracts but there is also a freedom of contract involved in non-monogamous constructions of commitment as exampled here. A sense of contract, whether of honesty or building together, remains the precise means by which these participants enact their freedom and right to be non-monogamous, and by which ‘realistic’ relationships are authenticated in their aimed for exclusivity and permanence. In other words, the non-monogamous ‘flexibility’ of these committed relationships is ironically more concerned with deployment of ‘contract’, ‘parameters’, ‘agreement’ and ‘rules’ precisely because the aims of ‘staying together’ and having something that ‘nobody else can replace’ are not tied to the inevitability of a monogamous marriage-like contract. The romantic needs and ideals (constituted as exact knowing, security, certainty and permanence in the above extracts) as signifiers and navigations of relational ‘truth’ remain ever-present in this freedom-from-contract despite these individuals positioning themselves as being free to organise themselves and arrange their own relationships according to various ethical practices and one’s own conscience. In that both forms of monogamous and non-monogamous contract/freedom can be seen to simultaneously endow a relationship (whether ‘conventional’ or ‘alternative’) with meaning and significance, a simplistic division between tradition and liberation is, as the above analysis illustrates, not sustainable. Hence commitment does not simply manifest in a relationship in either form but must be appraised as a contested practice involving various points of tension that are seen to be resolvable in an ethical management of ‘honest’ truth-telling, communication and perpetual labour (Sahlstein and Baxter, 2001).

In the following section I explore ways in which the ethical disciplines of self-mutual regulation are activated by the imperative of creative labour that is made paramount in contemporary couple relationships (both non-monogamous and non-married monogamous relationships) as a means for drawing one into a relation to politico-romantic ‘truth’ and the ‘needs’ this actively specifies.

6.7 Commitment as labour

Like Clare’s quote above, the following extracts highlight a ‘commitment as labour’ construction.
Angela [H/M]: {Commitment’s} about admitting what you want in your future with another person. It’s about deciding on a goal with another person and working towards that. / MF: mm / So it might not necessarily be about getting married ‘cause I don’t really believe in marriage. But it might be about becoming together and real life steps that have to be taken in order to be together and living in the same house, or buying a house together.

Dominic [H/M]: Commitment? […] I am committed to Angela. I’m committed to be her partner for ever more. Ar, it’s something that you earn, that is earned. The commitment is earned.

Barry [G/NM1/ND]: Um, I think it {commitment} is a belief in um, in a person. And that, and the fact that you want to build a relationship between yourself and that person. Um, and to work at it. And explore it, and build it, and grow it. And um, have something that’s meaningful at the end and working, if you like, and to put myself second to a degree.

The subject of a non-negotiable, formal commitment of marriage, as seen above (page 179), can act as a hopeful spectator of ‘natural’ progression as the freedoms of security and contentment unfold by virtue of this contract. In contrast, these three extracts depict a subject who actively procures success and security by virtue of a commitment construed as labour (a practical and emotional labour that critical and feminist theorists have highlighted as involving gender differentials and inequality; e.g. Duncombe and Marsden, 1993; Dryden, 1999; cf. Dixon and Wetherell, 2004). Dominic ‘earns’ commitment and Angela, his partner, ‘works’ towards the agreed to goal of their (non-married) commitment. The values and assurances of a ‘meaningful’ relationship, togetherness and security are not as automatic (or guaranteed by a ceremony) for this couple or for Barry as they are for Marianne and Ken (as above) but are striven for, earned and actively worked at. As such these extracts can be read as reflecting a fundamental principle of neo-liberalism that one actualises self, individual projects, security, fulfilling lifestyles and a meaningful end product through productive labour, continuous enterprise and consumption (see Rose, 1999; Hoschschild, 2003). Within this totalising meta-narrative of enterprise, Barry in particular positions himself as an enterprising ‘builder’, ‘grower’ and intrepid explorer of a ‘meaningful’ relationship that gains its meaning precisely because it is seen to ‘work’ as a result of the labour and effort that one puts into it.

That these participants draw on economic metaphors to articulate their commitments reflects a late capitalist conflation of life and work and a merging of the social with things
economic such that personal lives and relationships are increasingly conceptualised, talked about, valued, and enacted as economic projects that require effort and responsible management (Hochschild, 2003). And the economically oriented social exchange theories of psychology used to theorise couple commitment, particularly from the 1970s (see chapter two), with their rhetoric of costs, rewards, favourable outcomes, comparison levels and balance, and their construction of commitment as a rational calculation are equally enabled by, as they also reflect, this same political ethos and the enterprise culture it fosters. In light of the contractual logic of liberalism (dominant in Western culture from the eighteenth century onwards) wherein work and labour were no longer considered just a means to money and financial security but also the means for becoming more fully ourselves and for generating personal happiness (Rousseau, Diderot), one can account for the historically developing humanist construction of romantic partnerships as satisfying these needs via a ‘properly’ enacted couple-labour and preparedness to ‘work’ at them.

While Angela articulates her commitment as not being about getting married per se, the agreed to goal and ways in which this couple ‘become together’ nevertheless involve the conjugal traditions of co-habitation, buying a house together, and (sexual and emotional) monogamy. As a responsibilised subject who is entitled to make promises and vouch for a future, Angela can talk about herself as being able to decide on a goal with Dominic. She can talk of being able to say what she wants and freely choose, but the very decisions and goals she is able to articulate and aspire to are not themselves reoriented by the ability to ‘freely’ choose them. The ‘real life steps’ taken in order to ‘be together’ are no less than an ascension towards the discursively constituted conventionality of what it means to be successfully ‘together’ in a ‘working’ and domesticated relationship. Thus, the flexibilities and freedoms of ‘non-contracted commitment’ as celebrated by liberal-humanist theorists are always and already constrained by the culturally established ways of commitment and the already in place system of meaning, relationship trajectories, personal needs and modes of authentication that come packaged with the discursive practice of couple commitment; a contractual practice that I have argued is itself imbricated in (and produced by) the politically fashioned relationship between sovereign government and a liberal self-government.

That couple-commitment is commonly constructed and lived as a form of enterprise produces potent power effects not only in terms of the kind of enterprises and goals that are
to be consumed by us in our commitments but also in terms of the kinds of disciplines and self-regulations it renders the ‘committed’ subject susceptible to. While the couple commitments of ‘modernity’ can be celebrated as flexible and as individually established and negotiated, the labourers who proudly enact this flexibility, precisely because of this positioning, are made the ready targets for, and enticed to seek out, a range of training programs designed to equip workers with maximum skill and the proper techniques for efficient production that involve, for instance, skills in management, information handling, communication, problem solving and decision making. As Rose (1985) for example suggests, the various ‘healthy commitment’ projects of the psy-disciplines (see Giddens, 1992; Harvey and Wenzel, 2001) are complicit in this process as we are enticed by them to remain productive in our relationships, make them ‘work’ efficiently, take managerial responsibility for success and failure, evaluate performance, and ‘earn’ for ourselves the espoused benefits, rewards and levels of excellence that are possible and ours to achieve through enterprising endeavour.

In the following extract, Tyler further illustrates the enterprising and humanistic commitment of Giddens’ (1992) ‘modern’ couple relationship.

*Tyler (H/NM2/ND): You got to promise and not fuck anybody else for the rest of your life, and that’s commitment. And for me that’s such a sad, myopic, tunnel vision approach to what commitment is. For me commitment is not only a promise of what’s going to happen in the future. A commitment for me is to commit to be honest, to be nurturing, to appreciate, to sacrifice, to grow. To provide intimacy and a few other things as well.*

As in Clare’s earlier quote (page 194), Tyler’s enterprising construction of commitment is set up as a contrast to the ‘sad and myopic’ promise or commitment of sexual monogamy. In this account commitment still constitutes a promised future but emphasis is again put on the effort, provisions, technologies and projects required to realise it. Sexual prohibition is replaced with equally regulative liberal-humanist concepts of a developing, sacrificial and nurturing ‘self’ that work to occlude regulation in the inference of a ‘better’ kind of freedom (see also chapter seven’s discussion of intimacy as a ‘vital’ provision of coupledom as Tyler mentions it here). In this freedom, like in previous extracts, the ethical acts one must be prepared to engage in as the means of freedom, affirmation, and authenticity (both personal and relational) are made explicit. Of significance here, as with Barry’s extract above, is that
the neo-liberal autonomous entrepreneur in the context of a loving relationship is simultaneously an ethical subject who sacrifices and puts themselves ‘second’ (Barry). Again, romantic tradition and the self-sacrifice it involves particularly for women (Hollway, 1989; Wetherell, 1995; Robinson, 1997), conflicts with the liberalist values of self-affirmation and independence such that the liberally ‘committed’ subject is at any one time variously constituted and disciplined by contradictory discourses and ideological contestation (cf. Hollway, 1984; Stenner, 1993; Lawes, 1999).

In the following extracts this organisation of a prevaricated ‘commitment’ into contradictory sets of discursive resources and practices creates a very conflicted and confused ambiguity, particularly for female participants where commitment is made (ambiguously) meaningful according to gender-differentiated discourses.

_Geraldine [H/M]:_ When I'm in a relationship I find it very easy to be faithful. Like maybe it’s just something I want to give of myself. /MF: mm / But the conflict I have is that I don’t want to be responsible to anyone and don’t want to have that feeling that I might possibly hurt someone.

_Elizabeth [L/M]:_ Commitment is (_) not marriage. It’s um, it’s (_) committing, commitment is, well it’s being in a relations’, staying with that, oh, not staying with that person. All these words I’m using. Um (_) well commitment is supporting (_) I guess one person. But why one person? I don’t know, I don’t know, I don’t know.

_Tricia [H/M]:_ Commitment is (_) again (Giggles). I'm such a Gemini. Commitment I don’t know. I've sort of got double standards and beliefs. Commitment I would like to think is being sexually commitment to your partner. And emotionally as well. Yeah.

The relationship to commitment in these extracts is an ambiguous one that involves ‘conflict’, ‘double standards and beliefs’, and confusion about what commitment means. Here the ambiguity, conflict and double standards spoken of can be interpreted as being particularly active in the subject positioning of women in relation to commitment where a romantic and monogamous ‘have-hold’ discourse by which women are more likely to read a sexual relationship (Hollway, 1989) converges and conflicts with the (masculinised) ‘permissive’ discourse (ibid.) as an alternative and often intersecting means of constituting a sexual relationship. Geraldine’s relation to commitment and to herself as a ‘committed’
subject is ambiguous in that she gives an account of wanting ‘to give’ herself by being sexually and emotionally ‘faithful’ but expresses apprehension about the responsibility attached to the ‘have-hold’ imperative wherein women are particularly produced as being responsible for emotional labour (Dryden, 1999) and relational stability (Maushart, 2001). Geraldine speaks of finding it ‘very easy to be faithful’ and thereby draws on the ‘have-hold’ repertoire that emphasises monogamy, renders her responsible for emotional labour and sets up the obligation to not ‘hurt’ her partner. However, by articulating that she doesn’t want to have this responsibility and thus possibly cause hurt, Geraldine simultaneously draws on a permissive and liberal repertoire that men commonly deploy to make sense of their sexual relationships and that serves to disassociate them from emotional responsibility and commitment (Hollway, 1989; see chapter five).

Clearly for these participants the ‘have-hold’ and ‘permissive’ discourses, as Hollway interprets them, along with, I suggest, the effect of a neo-liberal incitement to take responsibility for oneself, recommend different and contradictory standards of commitment and produce a contested ‘committed’ subjectivity particularly in relation to women. The effect of this discursive (gendered) contestation is that commitment at any one time can be constructed as an ambiguous practice with co-existing, multiple meanings such that the practice is certainly not the coherent, rationally assessed and easily measured quality psychology generally takes it to be (e.g. Adams and Jones, 1997). Rather conflicting, politically driven and gender differential discourses are available to produce different knowledges, meanings and practices of couple-commitment and ‘committed’ subjectivities. As with the meanings of sex, love, gender and jealousy, for example, the meanings of commitment are no more unitary or static than the various discourses such as a monogamous and self-sacrificial romantic love, sexual permissiveness and a self-managed, autonomous individualism that compete to define the contested practice of commitment and undermine its alleged stabilising effect.

In using ‘all these words’ and mixing the values that produce and converge on the discursive practice of commitment – ‘marriage’ versus ‘relationship’, ‘staying with’ or ‘not staying with’, ‘one person’ or ‘not one person’, Elizabeth in particular constructs commitment as a confusing, non-coherent and non-unitary notion that is difficult to classify let alone manage. Her relation to the practice and to herself as a ‘committed’ monogamous partner (as she
affirms elsewhere in her interview) can certainly be read as an ambiguous one. Again the implication here is that couple-commitment, as psychologised by both mainstream and liberal theorists, is not reflective of a rational, decisive, and coherent subject. As illustrated by the above extracts, commitment is not experienced by virtue of this kind of subjectivity. On the contrary, this analysis suggests that commitment can be experienced as a set of conflicting metaphors, leakages of meaning, dualistic repertoires, ideological dilemmas, and confounding values that simultaneously infuse the practice and which can render it, and the future it predicts, as difficult to manage given the perplexing mix of methods and subjectifications (e.g. autonomy or dependence, monogamous yet not wanting to be responsible, and conventional and libertine contracts) we have to ‘manage’ commitment by. Commitment, then, is not simply about the rational management of individual desire and need or the rational assessment of a relationship and one’s positive feelings about it but, as Stenner (1993) argues in relation to couple-jealousy, is rather “constitutive of the relationship, productive of contradictory and non-essential identities and generative of emotional experience” (ibid.: 131; italics in original).

That commitment is routinely theorised and constructed as a practice of management (see Harvey and Wenzel, 2001) assumes an underlying ambiguity in relationships that is to be organised in and by commitment. Inasmuch as ‘ambiguity’ is socio-politically opposed to a privileged ‘certainty’ it can be seen as an ambiguity that is to be somehow resolved through labour and the managerial project of, for example, honest communication. However such ambiguity, I argue, is not one to be resolved and surmounted through ‘liberation’ or ‘pure’ relating (Giddens, 1992). Drawing on a Deleuzian line of argument (see also Butler, 1990), it is, I would argue, precisely at the point of conceptual and discursive ambiguity and uncertainty that another transformative creativity not predicated on a liberalist freedom from ambiguity and uncertainty is possible; a creativity or ‘line of flight’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1977) that does not hold to and is not limited by a dichotomous ‘either/or’ ordering of values as apparent in the extracts immediately above, but one that positively codes ambiguity and “causes strange flows to circulate that do not let themselves be stocked within [and reconfirm] an established order” (ibid.: 138). The so-called ‘transformations’ and ‘liberations’ of contemporary couple-commitment, such as I have outlined them, are limited forms of resistance to tradition because they are the productions of a managed ordering of ambiguity and uncertainty and, like conventional (monogamous) practices of commitment, prioritise a
construed need for the securities of order, containment, constancy and certainty as ultimate human desires.

I have highlighted the discursive practice of couple-commitment as a contested one, as never unitary in meaning but produced and inhabited by various contradictory repertoires (the ‘ideal’ and the ‘real’), two versions of freedoms (freedom of and from contract), two forms of contract (that of legalistic vows and of labour), and the subjectifications of committed couples as spectators in their own relational journey on the one hand and as entrepreneurs on the other. As Lawes (1999) and Sahlstein and Baxter (2001) similarly assert, couple-commitment is organised into contradictory sets of discursive resources and, as such, brings into question research that treats it as a classifiable and measurable concept and as a coherent and stabilising relationship component. Neither psychological management programs nor the enticing options and greater choices of neo-liberalism ensure a better freedom or greater stability so much as produce ambiguity about where such freedom and stability are to be discovered and on what terms, as apparent in Elizabeth’s ‘I don’t know’ confusion, Tricia’s ‘double standards’ and Geraldine’s ‘conflict’. And it is at the point of a negatively charged ambiguity to be ‘ideally’ surmounted that we are enticed to voluntarily attach ourselves and our relationships to the various projects, resources and management styles on offer in the vast self-help and relationship counselling industry in order to overcome it. The organisational imperative of couple trust is one such project and management tool that like the related promise of commitment can also be seen as the effect of socio-historical constructions of human need and desire, specifically a ‘need’ to master uncertainty and reduce fear in a maximisation of security that calls for the government of self-mutual discipline (Deleuze and Guattari, 1977; Foucault, 1985, 1986; Rose, 1989, 1999).

6.8 Trust as a steering force

In that relationship trust is theorised in psychology as a process of uncertainty reduction that works alongside commitment (Holmes and Rempel, 1989), an uncertainty and ambiguity are already presumed which again brings into question the very certainty that commitment is meant to generate (Solomon, 1981). By virtue of a commonly deployed trust, uncertainty in couple relationships is not simply reduced but consistently brought to the fore such that both certainty and ambiguity are made to co-exist in the couple domain as mutually
enforcing manifestations of power. The following analysis of couple-trust is an exploration of its regulatory power effects as it functions to police promises and ostensibly reduce uncertainty and doubt while maximising security and truth.

Given that commitment, in its various manifestations as highlighted above, is frequently constituted as the promise of a future permanence, couple-trust concerns the predictability and certainty of this future. Like commitment, the value and practice of ‘trust’ in couple relationships is also made possible and commonly deployed because of the contractual basis of these relationships of exchange.

Brian [G/NM1]: Trust? / MF: yeah / Um, well trust that (giggles), um, I can trust Charlie that he’s not going to break his commitments to me (giggles). Yeah, trust goes very close with commitment.

Peter [G/NM2]: I always look at commitment as being um, it sort of goes hand in hand with um, with trust.

Allan [G/M]: Commitment and trust I think for me go hand in hand.

This discursive correlation between ‘commitment’ and ‘trust’ is clearly expressed in seventeenth century social contract theory and its constitutional framing of interpersonal affiliations. In his version of the theory, Hobbes (1651) gives trust a special emphasis, interpreting it as the resulting obligation or responsibility of the social contract. For Hobbes, “nothing is more easily broken than a man’s word” (cited in Lessnoff, 1990: 57); a bond or covenant in itself assures nothing and so one’s right to protect oneself and ensure one’s freedom is necessarily never abandoned. And this ‘right’ to protect oneself translates into an expectation that others be trusting to their word – as Brian expects of Charlie. In order to fulfil the conditions of the social contract one has both a ‘right’ to expect trustworthiness and a ‘duty’ to be trustworthy having made a promise or agreement. Contract and trust are thus intricately linked in the liberalist constructions of justice, freedom and security and this association resonates in the discourse of relationships (as articulated by participants) wherein commitment and trust are expressed as existing ‘hand in hand’. Commitment brings forth the very possibility of, and generates the need for trust as that which helps assure the fulfilment of a relational pledge.
Joe [H/M]: Trust, I think that’s one of the cornerstones of relationships, trust. And um, trust is where you know that, through the commitment of a relationship, that certain intimacies aren’t going to be broached with other people and that […] And, trust is something that I think, well in my relationship trust is, trust is everything.

For Joe, as in Hobbesian contract theory, ‘trust is everything’ because it certifies and authenticates the initial commitment and the relationship trajectory there set up – in this case a promise and future of monogamy. Trust also gains its warrant in being described as a ‘cornerstone’ which, as seen in the previous chapter, is a production of the ‘home’ metaphor that is frequently deployed by participants when accounting for their relationships. Similarly for Samantha in her (emotionally exclusive) non-monogamous relationship (NM1), trust is foundational.

Samantha [B/NM1]: If trust isn’t there, like I couldn’t have a non-monogamous relationship if I didn’t trust it. I just wouldn’t have the relationship. That’s when things turn sour. You know, if you don’t have trust I think that it, a lot of things start {happening} in your relationship that can turn it in the wrong direction.

Without the certification and guarantee of trust Samantha would not engage in a non-monogamous relationship lest it ‘turn sour’ or head in the ‘wrong direction’ – as if such a relationship has a greater potential to get out of control. The trajectory of her relationship, like Joe’s, is supported, guided and assured by the principle and practice of trust. As both a foundation/cornerstone and a guiding mechanism for the certainty of a future, trust, as it is constituted in these accounts, enables one to be confident that a relationship will head in the ‘right’ direction. In being constructed as a guiding or steering force trust works to guarantee a predictable future and in so doing affords a significant sense of freedom and security as this future is ‘rightly’ steered towards non-ambiguity and certainty.

Inasmuch as the contract of commitment does not alone generate the certainty or the freedom it infers, trust is construed by couples as a steering force and as a mechanism for the reduction of uncertainty. As mentioned above, psychology theorises and warrants the value of trust in relationships on this basis (e.g. Rotter, 1980; Larzelere and Huston, 1980; Holmes and Rempel, 1989). But rather than interpreting couple trust as merely a stable, positive attitude or belief that one harbours because it is just one of those naturally occurring components of a healthy, stable relationship and necessary for it, I reframe trust as a
discursive construction that is made necessary because couple relationships are first conceptualised as economic and moral units designed to elicit certainty, predictability and security. In the etymological analysis of chapter four, the notion and practice of ‘trust’, like ‘stability’, was seen as being operationalised in the couple domain as part of a wider, historically specific discipline of constancy and stability wherein couples (and alliances of affect more generally) are psychologised, regulated and made visible as certain, predictable and contained entities in the service of capitalist socio-economic requirements (Deleuze and Guattari, 1977; Foucault, 1985; Rose, 1989). In other words, on the specific politico-economic requirement of social/relational regularity emerges the possibility of a ‘trust’ constructed as a steering mechanism or force that normalises the subject and relationships by driving these in the ‘right’ direction and thereby keeping them suitably contained and ensuring self-mutual regulation in the name of trust.

6.9 Trust and the production of relationships as maximum security institutions

Not only is trust constituted as a steering mechanism, it is talked about as steering relationships to a place of assumed surety and security.

_**Samantha [B/NM1]:**_ Trust is a sense of security with someone.

_**Barbara [L/NM2]:**_ Well um, trust is something that enables one to feel calm and confident to continue on doing whatever it is you’re doing.

_**Christine [L/NM2]:**_ Trust. Um (.) Oh (.) How do you define trust? Um, I guess it’s about, um, well about knowing what will happen in certain situations.

_**Ethan [H/NM2]:**_ Um (.) um (.) for me trust, kind of like when you trust somebody it’s that there’s no fear of being, kind of like there’s no, like when you trust somebody there’s no fear that you will be hurt by them or, like for example, you know, with my primary partner there’s no fear that I would lose them or they would go away, um, and that’s what it is to trust them.

These extracts construct trust as ‘something that enables’ either a predictive form of knowledge or a particular state of mind and sensory perception. As such, these various constructions produce trust in two ways – as a capacitative force that enables a knowing about what will yet happen and as a psychological attribute. Trust, then, is talked about as
existing both inside and outside of the subject and so psychological theory that reduces the concept to an individually harboured attitude simplifies the phenomenon and casts into shadow ways in which trust is constituted as an external force or mechanism that impacts on the subject through the various power relations it mobilises rather than originating with the subject. Thus the dynamic of trust is not simply demonstrated by the measurement of subjective and observable perceptions but is more thoroughly explored as a relational technology that can be called upon to enable, regulate and justify ‘normalised’ experience and subjectivity.

Specifically what these participants talk about as either being ‘enabled by’ or ‘sensed as’ trust is a state of fearless, confident security, a knowing of what will happen and the absence of doubt or wonder. Reflected in this is the psychological construction of trust as the reduction of uncertainty and risk. This psychologised function of trust is further illustrated in ways that participants construct ‘breaches’ or the absence of trust as that which can steer relationships and the experience of them towards hurt, pain and/or falsity.

Joe [H/M]: A breach of trust creates uncertainty and that within the mind of one of the partners.

Rachael [H/M]: Um, and if trust is broken it can be very hurtful and painful for people.

Angela [H/M]: Um, trust is when, trust with a person you love is when they go off on their own and you don’t wonder what they’re going to do. You don’t wonder if they’re going to hurt you. / MF: mm / Yeah, and when they tell you something they did you don’t wonder if it’s the truth or not.

For these participants a breach of trust represents a breach of contracted surety, truth and psychological security. And security is constructed, at least implicitly, as certainty, predictability, and as a knowledge of what will happen (or what the other will or will not do). In these constructions of trust as that which wards off uncertainty, doubt, pain, fear and hurt, there is the insinuation that trust is somehow naturally correlated with security and is a demonstration of it. But it can be argued that as discursive phenomena, there is no natural or inherent correlation between ‘trust’ and ‘security’. As the social contract was conceived of as a means of justifying political authority and the form of ‘security’ it supposedly fosters against what was construed as ‘insecurity’, relational trust as a contractual concept can be
seen as being assigned its value and function according to this same logic. In Hobbesian theory, as with later social contract theorists (Locke, Rousseau and Kant; see Lessnoff, 1990), the justifications of ‘contract’ and ‘trust’ were predicated on an a priori negative construction of uncertainty and unpredictability. That is, in the liberalist legitimisation of the social contract and of the right and duty of trust, fear of uncertainty is the basis for the rationale of trust. Thus ‘security’ is made knowable through an a priori awareness of that which we are to fear as threatening and notions of ‘security’ are always and already relative to that which is authorised as ‘uncertain’ and ‘fearsome’ in political discourse (Buzan et al, 1998). In order to sense or know ‘security’, so the deductive reasoning goes (Hobbes, 1651), we must first have a sense or knowledge of uncertainty or lack and be made to fear it (Nietzsche, 1887a; Deleuze and Guattari, 1977). Thus the ‘certainty’ and ‘uncertainty’ evoked in constructions of trust are not separate, mutually exclusive phenomenon but work in tandem to make the other possible, ascribe each its meaning and, moreover, mobilise the warrant for the regulatory mechanisms of trust.

Social contract theory premises fear – the basis of its rationales for contract and trust - on a hypothesised state of humankind prior to entering into social contracts and enacting trust. Variously conceived by theorists (Rousseau, for example, offers a more positive take on our supposed ‘natural’ and ‘primitive’ condition than Hobbes, see Lessnoff, 1990), this prior state is construed as involving a perpetual fear of uncertainty that is tantamount to being kept ‘in chains’ and denied ‘real’ liberty (Rousseau, in Lessnoff, 1990). So freedom itself is represented as a state of freedom from these fears and as being indicative of certainty and security. What is significant here in terms of trust is that, according to the enabling logic of liberalism, it is deployed and practiced as no less than a means of freedom and truth and for reducing uncertainty lest we are returned to our ‘primitive’ and insecure state of perpetual fear and a “poor, nasty, brutish, and short” life (Hobbes, 1651; cited in Lessnoff, 1990: 54). A fear of insecurity and uncertainty is thus intricately linked to, indeed historically embedded in, the politicised value and practice of contract and hence of commitment and trust. And trust refers to and reinstates this construed fear as the very basis for its deployment, knowledge and power. The logic of the social contract and its warrant for mutual trust and dependency is reflected in the above extracts that construct trust as a force for (or sense of) the reduction of uncertainty and the generation of security. Ethan (pages 205-6) in particular talks of trust as the absence of fear: ‘when you trust someone there’s no fear’. In his
definition of ‘trust’ the construct is reinforced by three times referring to an absence of fear.
In this and the other extracts above, the value of trust is relative to, made possible by, an
already in place conceptualisation of a fearsome uncertainty that is assumed to exist in the
absence of trust and its ostensible securities.

My application of social contract theory here has been for the purpose of highlighting the
historically and politically contingent nature of a particular rationality of trust that is
articulated by participants in accounting for their relationships and that, I would argue, has
had significant impact on contemporary relationship consciousness. In line with the
argument made here (and as support for it), current critiques of the concept of ‘security’
challenge the very idea of a security that trust is meant to produce. Critical security theorists
concerned with international relations (e.g. Buzan, 1991; Krause and Williams, 1997; Buzan
et al, 1998) for example, expand traditional and realist notions of security which, they
similarly argue, are defined and politicised in relation to a priori assumptions of ‘real’
vulnerabilities and threats that are to be ‘feared’. In liberalist discourse, as I have already
suggested, the concept and practice of securitisation is constituted within the discursive
establishment of an existential threat that is itself constructed as something to be feared and
overcome (Buzan et al, 1998). In this traditional conceptual framework the political construct
of ‘security’ represents a freedom achieved by the defeat of a perceived threat and focuses on
survival as the primary condition of existence. In short, the value of the traditional
conceptualisation of ‘security’ – and therefore of ‘trust’ - is predicted on the impossible
dream of absolute invulnerability from a fictional threat of pre-contract existence (Krause
and Williams, 1997).

Critical security theorists argue that issues are produced as ‘security’ issues through language
and speech acts (Buzan et al, 1998). Security, then, is re-interpreted as a discursive dynamic
and ‘reality’ that is both socially and politically constructed. Fear as the driving force for a
security politics concerned, for example, with the war on terrorism, border protection and
homeland security, is challenged as a (neo)liberal political strategy. Thus the argument is
made that notions of ‘security’ are not separable from political theory and discourse; that
concerns for, and practices of security cannot be understood without considering their
constitution in the politico-social discourse which makes prevailing accounts of security (and
insecurity) seem so plausible (Krause and Williams, 1997). Threats of security and fear of
insecurity are so perceived because they are presented as such within particular discursive and political constellations (Buzan et al., 1998). Genealogical studies (e.g. Hacking, 1990; Ewald, 1991) have, along similar lines, understood the current notion of ‘risk’ and ‘risk taking’, along with the taming of ‘chance’, as being implicated in a particular system of thought. Within this critical and post-structuralist approach consideration of what security ‘really is’ is sidestepped in favour of questioning the conditions for security and the kinds of subjectivities being produced within a discourse of security. And, I suggest, the same questioning can be applied to a relational trust that warrants specific conditions of security and therefore a regulated subjectivity.

In this exegesis I am not discounting trust as a ‘useful’ component of couple relationships (or any others) but am aiming to frame a reassessment of the ways in which this usefulness is currently reasoned, legitimised and valued within the liberalist discourse of security and its notion of contract. To restate, there is no inherent value or function of ‘trust’ outside of the discourse that constructs and authorises it against a fore-grounded fear of uncertainty and insecurity. That couple trust can be spoken of a sense of security with someone, as affording confidence, as representing a way of ‘knowing’, and as averting fear, pain, hurt and loss is the discursive effect of how ‘security’ and ‘insecurity’ have themselves been constituted and politicised over time. In the above extracts what is being privileged is a security of predictability, certainty and constancy with the absence of trust, consistent with the rationale of contract theorists, signifying an unwelcome state of fear and doubt. In participants’ accounts, security in relationships is talked about as ideally maximised because it is believed to facilitate a freedom from doubt, and so on, but in this process of maximising security by way of trust it is the power effects and regulations of trust that are maximised more than any ‘real’ security. In the following section, then, I explore ways in which the regulative powers of trust are made operable in and by the maximising of a relational and personal security that a contractual trust is meant to establish.

6.10 (Self) regulations of trust

As that which reduces uncertainty, trust is defined by the psy-disciplines as an attitude that reflects the knowing or confident belief that a partner can be relied on (e.g. Holmes and Rempel, 1989; Giddens, 1992; Boon, 1994; Sabatelli, 1999). A sense of confidence is
endemic to the relationships of those who have successfully achieved a comparatively full capacity to trust each other, asserts Boon (1994). And the qualities necessary for such a capacity to be realised are said to include dependability, faith, responsiveness, and the ability to resolve conflict (Boon 1994). More pertinent, however, to a critical analysis of couple-trust than the conceptualisation of it as a stable cognition or individual disposition is how the subject is produced in participants' accounts as a couple ‘work’ towards achieving a ‘full capacity to trust each other’. So beyond theorising these qualities and conducts as necessary for a trusting and successful relationship, what I want to consider is ways in which the requirements of dependability and reliably and this ‘full capacity to trust’ constitute and regulate the ‘trusted’ subject and the ‘trusting’ relationship.

**Max** [H/NM2]: Trust. Um, I guess the belief that the person that you are relating to um, will be totally open and honest with you in all regards. Not withholding things by omission. Um () knowing that you can rely and depend on that person.

**Rebecca** [L/M]: Um, knowing that you can rely on your partner and this, when it comes back to trusting someone’s word and knowing that if they say they’re going to do something, that’s going to happen. I suppose establishing routines.

**Rachael** [H/M]: Trust. Um, I think trust is, trust is a word to me that indicates you can rely on somebody to be reliable and honest.

**Christine** [L/NM2]: Ar, to me trust is [...] feeling that I know how she feels about me and that she’s honest about that.

In these extracts, as in psychological theory, belief in a reliable, dependable and honest partner is made the foundation of a trusting relationship. But what are the grounds of this crucial reliability and dependability? What forms of subjectifications, that is, what kinds of relations to self and other are occurring in the deployments of trust? Conceptualising trust as simply a belief in a partner’s commitment, dependability or honesty and thereby assuming the possibility of truth about the person – a possibility that is critiqued by critical theorists (e.g. Henriques et al, 1984; see chapter three) - occludes ways in which ‘belief’ in another is the direct result of, and always relative to, ways in which the other is obligated, regulated, moralised and, therefore, able to be believed in and trusted. In maximising security by way of mutual trust, the fidelities and certainties of honesty, constancy, and predictability are drawn up over relationships, domesticities, conduct, selves and psychological adjustment. While the
imperatives of honesty and authenticity are more fully explored in terms of self-disclosing intimacy (chapter seven), suffice it to say here that trust appears to demand a certainty of truth that is ‘ideally’ demonstrated by a regularity and constancy of selves, promises, behaviours, feelings and routines, as illustrated in the extracts above. The obligation that Max sets up in the name of trust is one of ‘not withholding things by omission’. That this form of honesty can be included as a property of trust (as it is in constructions of commitment and intimacy) extends the play of trust well beyond mere promise keeping and dependability and trust is deployed as a justificatory device for the solicitation of truth and accountability. And in a solicitation of ‘truth’ that is further warranted and authorised by trust the regulatory and normalising disciplines of self-mutual examination, surveillance and confession that bind the subject to a regulated and calculable way of being are compelled and enacted (see Foucault, 1977a; 1978a).

The realist assumption behind this ‘certainty of truth’, one that is challenged in a critical and post-structuralist analysis of trust, is that a demonstrable, observable, and knowable ‘truth’ exists in some kind of pure, non-relative and non-abstract form anterior to discourse and social action (Willig, 1997; Stephenson et al, 2000). On such a supposition, trust is endowed with particular power as it guides people and couples towards a relation to truth that is never knowable in and of itself because ‘truth’ is not a discreet, static or objective concept but is always relative to knowledges that are organised, authorised and constructed as thinkable, legitimate and ‘objectively’ knowable such as the ‘truth of self’ – a particular knowledge that binds the human subject to the webs and processes of contemporary government (Foucault, 1977e, 1978a, 1978b). As pointed out in chapter four and as illustrated in the following extract, this imperative to be truthful is not only constituted as a requirement to ‘accurately’ relay ‘facts’ but also to tell the ‘truth’ about oneself, one’s desires, feelings, conduct and thought such that the telling and demonstration of ‘truth’ in the name of trust (and also of commitment and intimacy) ties the normalised subject to a regularity and consistency of ‘self’ whereby one is made calculable, accountable and governable in a visibility of (and production of) intimate detail (Nietzsche, 1887a; Foucault, 1977a, 1978a).

*Samantha [B/NM1]:* {Trust is} respect for someone. Telling them exactly how you feel. What you want to do, what you don’t want to do. What you want them to do, what you don’t want them to do. That kind of stuff.
Here a ‘respect for someone’ and the telling of ‘exact’ truth are constituted as telling them what you want/don’t want and what you want/don’t want them to do. In producing and validating this kind of power relation, trust can be articulated as moving oneself, a relationship and one’s partner towards the ‘right direction’. Given that trust is construed as a force that steers a relationship and subjects in ‘right’ directions and avoids the ‘wrong’ direction, the path laid out by trust is a narrow and clearly signposted one indeed in terms of how the subject of trust is required to operate and be experienced and also in terms of a ‘trusting’ relationship that is directed towards a security of certain and predictable ‘truth’ that is made clear in a telling authorised by trust. In order to be trusted and respected one’s partner is made the target for a regulation and monitoring of actions and conduct with ‘respect’, at least implicitly, being enabled by a partner’s compliance to such regulation. By virtue of the value and regulatory mechanism of trust and the ideal security and relation to truth it is meant to produce, the powers of domination and submission are legitimised as ‘right’ and ‘duty’ and made necessary for the workability of a relationship. In this extract one has a right to tell and a duty to be told in the demonstration of trust and the ‘stuff’ of trust takes on regulative force as it steers and constitutes couples in this contracted exchange of duties, rights and truths.

A significant aspect of the regulative force of trust is that its power is configured as, is discursively tied up with, and is seen to generate the values of respect, admiration and self worth.

*Joe [H/M]*: And it {trust} also means that you do have this admiration for the other person and that.

*Robert [H/M]*: I feel better about myself as a human being because I haven’t done the wrong thing by Tricia.

Here distinction is bestowed on one who is credited as being trusted and trusting. As a consequence of trust Joe is able to admire his wife and Robert can feel good about himself as his actions are steered in the ‘right’ direction and the ‘wrong thing’ is averted. In bestowing such moralised distinction, trust functions as a potent technology in and for the experience of the (masterful) moral-ethical subject. That is, the couple willingly engage with (submit to) the guiding and regulative power of trust because it confers prestige, kudos and
self-worth. Perhaps more than a capacity to promise and vouch for futures (we don’t speak of an ‘aversion to trust’), trust is discursively bound up with the very moral fibre and status of the subject and thus its path is a difficult one to deviate from. So while the ‘cornerstone’ of trust in this discursive context is constituted as guaranteeing and strengthening a relationship and as maximising security, it also works to maximise integrity, self-affirmation, good conscience and thus constitute moral identity.

On these terms I cannot agree with Giddens’ (1992) humanistic ideation of trust. “To trust someone”, he suggests, “means foregoing opportunities to keep tabs on them or force their activities within a particular mould” (ibid.: 140). This foregoing of regulation and the suggestion that “trust does not require continued auditing” (ibid.: 190) overlooks ways in which trust ties the responsible subject in search of distinction, moral credibility, and self-truth to a project of self-auditing and self-regulation (Foucault, 1984, 1985, 1986). As such, the subject keeps tabs on him/herself in the enactment of a regulatory and normalising trust that functions to establish a personal ‘truthfulness’ and ‘integrity’ and in these terms there is no foregoing of regulation but a continual examination of self in an internalisation of the normalising gaze of trust and its panoptic-like power (Foucault, 1977a; see chapter seven for a discussion of panopticism in relation to intimacy). One maintains trust not simply because another requires it but because one’s very identity, moral credibility, and a truthful relation to oneself depends on it. The assumption in Giddens’ notion of trust is that it is a practice of freedom independent from productive and controlling power relations, but in such practices of freedom, as I have sought to illustrate throughout these analyses, there are at work the technological reins of a regulatory and normalising self-mutual discipline that come packaged with them.

The following extract highlights further the power of trust as a mechanism for the conferral of distinction and moral integrity and thus illustrates how trust functions discursively as a means of self-regulation.

Dominic [H/M]: […] Ar, but having said that, I’m going to be tempted, and I have been tempted in the past. I know what a penalty that will bring with it and what penalties have been brought in the past in terms of damaging a relationship just on, in terms of what I’ve had to deal with. Um, guilt. Um, not being worthy. Measuring myself against my partner. And thinking of her and thinking ‘Oh, I’ve done the dirty
on her’. Or whatever. So having said that, ar, yeah I rate trust pretty highly [...] I deal with {temptation} the best I can. Ar, certainly living in a great partnership like I am helps, um, it helps me to find boundaries.

Having once broken the particular trust of monogamy, Dominic talks of the experience and of his occupancy of that subject position. He refers to a sense of unworthiness and guilt that is produced as he measures himself against the worth of she who bestowed the trust and on whom he ‘did the dirty’. In this extract (monogamous) trust establishes security because in the deployment of trust personal worth and integrity are measured and confirmed (or brought into question), self-accountability is enforced, judgement is made, penalty is warranted, temptation is managed, and self-discipline enacted. If trust serves in the maximising of security these are some of the very conduits (moderations) of subjectivity and responsible conduct by which that security is realised. In the deployment of trust an array of behavioural and psychological conducts are coded, moralised and mobilised, and it is via this discursive and penetrative process (one that does not begin and end with attitude or disposition) that ‘security’ and ‘truth’ are realisable and brought into view. Again the point here is that couple-trust does not produce the ‘great’, successful or secure relationship, and certainly not the ‘freedom’ suggested by Giddens, without there occurring a series of self and mutual managements of the ethical and regulative kind.

Whilst in the majority of psychosocial literature trust is conceptualised as individual attitude, reliable disposition and as a belief in a promise and another, recent critical feminist work (e.g. Willig, 1997; Stephenson et al, 2000) has attended to the (gendered) subjectifications, powers and potential dangers of couple-trust. For example, in Willig’s (1997) qualitative exploration of the deployment of trust as a justification of sexual risk taking in heterosexual relationships, trust is conceptualised as a fragile and variable subject position, as situationally specific and as purposeful social action that can justify risky patterns of behaviour. Willig argues that insofar as romantic relationships are constructed as relationship of trust, risky or dangerous actions such as unprotected sex can in fact be warranted by couple-trust. This research suggests that risk taking (unsafe sex) can be seen to affirm relational trust while safe sex can “constitute a challenge to the very nature of the [married] relationship” (ibid.: 213) because it can bring trust and a relationship itself into question. Thus “[i]n order to maintain the principle that relationships are based on trust, [people] in relationships must act in
accordance with this dictum even if this generates a personal risk” (ibid.: 215-6). Willig highlights trust as sometimes antithetical to honesty, truth, and personal security, indeed as a dangerous practice when operating as the rationale and motivation for unsafe couple-sex in risky circumstances. Such analysis converges with this current one inasmuch as Willig challenges the theoretical and cultural assumption that trust is “the most important quality two partners can share in a relationship” (O’Neill and O’Neill, 1972: 227) and problematises the assumed correlation between trust and security, safety, and truth.

The point to be emphasised here is that trust as a maximiser of security, truth and psychological well-being is a dubious notion because trust can interrupt this process more than necessarily guarantee it. A comment from Michael illustrates this tension.

Michael [G/NM1/ND]: Ar, trust I find is a very loaded word. Um, there’s always times when you don’t, where your trust lets you down totally. You can say you have complete trust and that’s all very well but, given the right circumstances, your trust can really play up on your emotional state. But we have trust. We do.

Michael expresses the fragility of a trust that can ‘let you down’ and ‘play up on your emotional state’. He can therefore be read as being sceptical of the ideal of a ‘complete trust’ and its assurances of certainty and predictability, at least on the one hand. Here trust is a ‘loaded’ force that can interrupt rather than cause emotional security. Significantly, however, Michael immediately follows this expression of scepticism by affirming that ‘we have trust’ and then ‘we do’. Despite the alluded to fragility and vulnerability of trust and himself as a ‘trusting’ partner, the imperative is reinvoked to signify the authenticity of this relationship lest it be brought into question by the preceding utterance. Michael may have experienced personal difficulty with the imperative and suppositions of trust but its power as a marker of relationship integrity is not diminished or made redundant. Like Willig (1997) and Stephenson et al (2003) – the latter arguing that the truth regime of trust both confirms a phallocentric fantasy of masculine subjectivity and forecloses on the possibility of other feminine expressions of desire and sexuality - I problematise this function of trust as a marker of self-relational ‘truth’. As couple-trust is invoked and practised as a signifier of authenticity, it sets in place a particular grid of intelligibility and code of conduct that the ethical subject and ‘trusting’ relationship are obliged to exercise and be examined against.
In this analysis of trust I have fore-fronted ways in which the imperative sets in motion its regulative productivity as couples are steered in a direction of a questionable ‘constancy’, idealised ‘security’, and an unobtainable ‘pure truth’ that are themselves only made plausible within a socially and politically constructed culture of responsibilisation and securitisation (Hacking, 1990; Rose, 1989, 1999; Buzan et al, 1998). As a technology for maximising security and for accessing the ‘truth’ of relationships, selves and an-other, the discursive practice of trust works to structure a tight grid of intelligibility that forms and mediates one kind of relation to self and others while it also legitimates the techniques of self and mutual control recognised as dependability, respect, moral integrity and a declare-all honesty. The very kinds of ‘truth’ and ‘security’ that trust makes knowable and calls forth are those that lock couples and relational experience into pre-prescribed patterns of predictability and constancy that are not easily deviated from lest security, self-worth and truth are themselves called into question. As suggested above, the historic, cultural, and psychological constitution of a stable, uninterrupted ‘security’ is predicated on all that is discursively worked up as risky, fearsome and dangerous so that this concept of security and its imperatives are made plausible and enthusiastically aspired to as a practice of freedom from this ‘risk’ and ‘danger’. Thus couple-trust does not simply avert insecurity, fear and uncertainty but brings these politicised elements into full view and gives them a particular presence as the force and strategic power of trust is maximised. And as trust is maximised so too are its constitutive imperatives, disciplinary technologies and normalising effects increasingly enabled in this play of freedom and truth.

6.11 Conclusion

This chapter has offered an analysis of some of the discursive properties, power relations and gravitational pulls that inhabit the contractual exchanges and productive practices of couple commitment and trust. I have aimed to highlight but a few of the discursive forces that are operationalised by these so-called management practices and which make intelligible and organise a particular inter/subjective experience. In this analysis of ways in which people talk about and thus produce commitment and trust, the constructs were interpreted as discursive mechanisms that infuse the couple domain with various values, patterns of thought, codes of conduct and technologies of truth that all reconfirm, and are relative to, a priori specifications and politicisations of human need, containment and authenticity. As
such, commitment and trust were seen as not being generated by mere attitude, disposition, belief or effective relating but as two inter-linked and contractual power-knowledges wherein the knowledges and practices of exchangeable truths and securities are organised and authorised in specific ways in relation to the political and economic shaping of the social body.

As tools of a socio-historically specific economy of exchange and its oversight, the psychologised practices in question work to stabilise, fix and mediate contracted relationships, their possible pathways and trajectories, and we who pursue freedom and security there. It is in pursuing precisely these ends that the power relations seen to be produced and legitimised in the tactical and essentialised qualities of commitment and trust as practices of freedom are largely shadowed and thus continually adhered to. That they are so is what, I suggest, makes a critical exegesis of these typically deployed ‘qualities’ necessary, which, as Foucault (1991) points out in relation to the invisible power relations embedded in the ethico-political choices we are required to make and practice everyday, is not to say that they are also ‘bad’ or of little worth.

Interpreted against the political rationality of neo/liberalism, the imperatives of commitment and trust can be seen as the (re)affirmations of a ‘consciousness of freedom and power’ (Nietzsche, 1887a) that involves a certain relation to ‘truth’ and ‘security’ (and their assumed opposites) wherein people, couples and their futures are constituted as, and required to remain, responsibly calculable and regular, and thereby largely accountable and governable. The certainties of promises, futures, knowledge, of ‘right’ feelings and actions are what the discursive practices of commitment and trust are deployed and valued as ensuring, although this is not without an apparent prevarication in participant’s accounts that highlights the questionable nature of the very certainties being sought. Yet it is by aspiring to, perpetually expecting and examining, and dutifully living out these ‘certainties’ as a means of mastering the ambiguities, doubts and fears that simultaneously inhabit the prized certainties and give them form that couples and couple-subjectivities are organised, normalised and effectively disciplined; marginalising other possible ways of relating or leaving them unexplored. In this continued occupancy of an ‘inside’ realm that commitment and trust serve to further fortify, and in their constitutive plays of ‘truth’ wherein ‘certainty’ is valued as undoubted fact and knowledge, as a pre-destined and reliable future, and as an unfailing consistency of selves
and conduct, we in our ‘certain’ subjectivities and relationships are not so much steered towards a relation to Truth or place of freedom but are colonised and securitised in a composed and settled state of good conscience, non-disturbance and inevitable movement as committed and trusting couples are steered towards a normalised, politically organised and moralised ‘right direction’.

What flows from the ‘hand in hand’ practices of commitment and trust, therefore, is not any inherent property, benefit and goodness that the concepts ‘naturally’ harbour and elicit. Rather, as I have suggested, as couples deploy these imperatives one is bound to prioritised ways of being-in and doing relationships - ways that make available, compel and regulate specific means of relating to oneself and an-other. That couples are ‘ideally’ bound or contracted to these ideological forms of knowledge, modes of relating and their vocabularies of ‘rights’ and ‘duties’ is because these imperatives culturally signify the freedoms/truths of certainty, authenticity and the security of containment and as such are difficult to deviate from even when ‘modernised’ and ‘transformed’ into negotiable, freely chosen agreements. Accordingly, I have in this chapter critiqued an enterprise culture’s freedom-from-contract as not being representative of self-relational ‘innovation’ wherein individuals are assumed to be self-determining the conditions of a revamped commitment and less coercive trust but have questioned the ‘right’ directions and the forms of subjectivity and discipline that are produced in a socially-historically constituted ‘rightness’ to which we are being increasingly steered (as ‘choice’) under neo-liberal governance. In this I have further illustrated the Foucauldian principle that productive power and social domination both assume and require the ‘freely’ enacted agency of those on whom power is exercised (Foucault, 1983).

In the following chapter, couple-intimacy is explored and deconstructed as a further navigational tool that is commonly deployed in a socio-political steering to this place of self and relational freedom and the forms of contained and certain authenticities thought to be attainable therein.
CHAPTER SEVEN

Discourse Analysis III

In(ti)mates, authenticity and regimes of truth

“The other is my good and my knowledge: only I know him, only I make him exist in his truth...[T]he other establishes me in truth: it is only with the other that I feel I am ‘myself.”

Roland Barthes (1977: 229)

“He who feels ‘I am in possession of the truth’, how many possessions does he not let go in order to rescue this sensation!”

Friedrich Nietzsche (1883: 223)

7.1 Introduction

The discursive and regulative practices of commitment and trust were in the previous chapter of analysis deconstructed as two interlaced fields of power-knowledge that frame and make available to the couple and coupled-subject various forms of truth-making. The idea that commitment and trust, like dyadic containment, work to produce overlapping fields or grids of power-knowledge gives emphasis to ways in which these principled practices create a dynamic network of intersecting lines of meaning and power that run through the couple domain to form various points of reference for the knowing of a stabilising authenticity, for arranging truths, futures and securities, for delimiting possibility, and for cultivating and containing experience and selves in a framework for relating that is historically, culturally and politically contingent. Within this discursive network multiple dichotomies, circuits of contested meanings, modes of subjectification, and relays of power and control are connected up in such a way that a systematised ‘order’ is evoked and made secure as particular relationships to freedom and truth are organised. Amidst the lines of force and directive vectors produced by these overlapping intelligibilities and practices, coupledom is made cognisable and valued as a domain of securitised certainty and
authenticity that as principles of freedom and truth have come to take precedence in a
developing ontology of substance and containment.

As a further relational imperative laid over and working in tandem with what it is to be
dyadically contained, committed and trusting, couple intimacy works to produce and justify a
power-infused visibility and voyeurism also in the name of certainty and a contained
authenticity. The particular economy of discipline that is warranted and produced as a matter
of and for ‘intimacy’ centres around a cultural ‘urge to tell’ (see Foucault, 1978a) that was
introduced in chapter four and which serves as a focus for this chapter of analysis. As in the
previous two chapters, this exegesis of intimacy rejects the usual psychologisation of the
concept as an essentialised, individualised and measurable component of ‘successful’ and
‘stable’ partnerships. What follows is a demystification of couple-intimacy as an abstract
signifier of emotional and sexual ‘closeness’. Instead into-me-see is understood as producing a
highly voyeuristic and penetrative visibility that constitutes and governs individuals/couples
through a series of regulative ethics and technologies of truth – in particular that of an
ethical ‘(dis)closure’ practiced as ‘open and honest’ communication of the confessional and
supervisory kind (Foucault, 1978a). In this chapter the disciplinary, stabilising principle of
‘authenticity’ as a crucial element in an ontology of containment and as a constitutive
practice of freedom and truth is further explored.

From the proposition, frequently asserted by participants and in psychological research, that
intimacy is intrinsically an announcement of ‘truth’ and emblem of ‘authenticity’, the guiding
questions for analysis are: what is ‘intimate truth’ produced as; how is it known; what kinds
of ‘telling’ does it require; and what are its justifications as a necessary knowledge and way of
relating? In other words, what regimented forms of truth and ways of knowing, and thus
what mechanisms of discipline and control, are cultivated in and by a discursive practice of
couple-intimacy that is constructed as ‘encapsulating’ the very essence of the couple
relationship?

7.2 Picturing couple-intimacy

Ken [H/M]: {Intimacy} is an integral part of a relationship. Mm. A very important
part.
Ricky [G/M]: {Intimacy} encapsulates a lot of what your relationship represents to you.

Of all the relationship components packaged and marketed in the social scientific and everyday constructions of relationships (see Fletcher et al, 2000 and Hendrick, 2004 for recent overviews) it is the ‘integral’ concept and practice of intimacy that is sold as ‘encapsulating’ the essence of personal and couple relationships (e.g. Levine, 1991) and as that which contributes most to relationship satisfaction and personal fulfilment (Prager and Burhmester, 1998). Thus driving scientific investigation into the concept and capacity of intimacy is the generally accepted and often repeated supposition that intimacy is crucial for both a successful, loving relationship and for a healthy, mature, and complete life (e.g. Freud, 1905; Erickson, 1963; Branden, 1981; Pittman, 1989; Prager, 1995, 2000). Within Psychology consensus also exists regarding intimacy’s central ingredient of ‘self-disclosure’. A self-disclosing into-me-see is said to be predominately produced by open and honest communication and exposure of a ‘real’ self (e.g. Jourard, 1964, 1971; Schaeff, 1989). Masters et al (1988) typically identify mutual self-disclosure as a key factor in the development of an open and ‘genuine’ intimacy as opposed to a ‘pseudo-intimacy’ of concealment and pretense. And Mackey et al (2000) define intimacy as the sense that one can openly and honestly communicate personal thoughts and feelings that are not generally expressed in other relationships. Whether viewed as a developmental process or as a sensory state, intimacy is often believed to be produced through an open, honest self-disclosure that is ultimately experienced as a ‘knowing and being known’ (e.g. Schaeff, 1989). In this ‘intimacy as self-disclosure’ repertoire, intimacy is theorised and constructed as a state wherein one is knowable and known by oneself and an-other in every way, where nothing pertaining to the self is left unshared, unspoken or hidden.

Thus a ‘developed’ couple-intimacy is meant to encapsulate and release the very ‘essence’ or ‘truth’ of selves, relationships and life. In this, the grounds for intimacy are made both explicit and enticing. But the various ‘truths’ assumed to be elicited by the proper enactments of a developed capacity for intimacy must be seen as being framed against already-existing conceptions concerning the nature of relational ‘success’, personal ‘health’ and ‘fulfilment’ and the constitution of the ‘good’ life, as well as being conditional on socio-historic assumptions about the ‘internality’ of persons and a knowable truth of this (as
discussed below). That is to say, the various relations to ‘truth’ that intimacy is assumed to facilitate are no relations to actual Truth but relations to endlessly constructed versions of what it is to be psychologically well-adjusted, mature and fulfilled, indeed what it is to be ‘authentically’ human.

According to Lawson’s romantic and humanist appraisal, a profound ‘body and soul’ intimacy is the most satisfying way of achieving personal and relationship ‘wholeness’.

“To become profoundly intimate with another person in both ‘body and soul’ – that is, in a sexual and an intellectual embrace – is a way, perhaps the most satisfying way of all, to attain that rounded wholeness.”

(Lawson, 1989: 26-7).

Making the warrant for intimacy similarly clear, Prager begins her psychology of intimacy monograph with this first line:

“If any reason needs to be given for devoting an entire book to intimacy, it is that intimacy is good for people. Intimate involvement seems to promote human well-being.”

(Prager, 1995: 1).

In being posited as necessary for such ‘well-being’ and ‘rounded wholeness’ - themselves socially constructed and historically contingent notions - the behaviours and perceptions in which a desirable intimacy is thought to reside and be manifested through are themselves promoted as functional and beneficial. In order to know the ‘goodness’ of intimacy and all that it offers, a specific set of behaviours, sensations and perceptions are, according to such theorists, necessarily experienced, shared and acted out. Intimacy, then, encapsulates more than the whole person or the good life but an array of self-relationship technologies, disciplines, and forms of truth that are framed and legitimised against what the ‘whole person’ and ‘good life’ - and their constitutive ‘opposites’ or ‘outsides’ - are assumed to be.

Asked to talk about what intimacy means to him, Tyler offers the following response.

Tyler [H/NM2/N]: For me intimacy is like a diamond. And with a diamond you’ve got different facets to it […] One facet of intimacy is that you are exposing a great deal of yourself. You’re explaining, divulging a great deal of yourself. That’s
Chapter Seven

part of it. / MF: mm / Ar, another part of intimacy is that you have shared in
discovery experiences. You’ve been together with this partner, with this person
whilst the two of you, at least one of you, has, is experiencing something new so that
you’re growing together. / MF: mm / Um, another aspect of intimacy is um, God, I
haven’t put it into words lately. Um, this strong sense of connection at the gut, the
rubber band that is sort of holding the two of you together in towards aspects like
commitment. Intimacy is a high level of honesty. Um, sharing of unspoken things. A
personality meld.

Tyler manages to objectify and ascribe a figurative coherency to intimacy by way of
metaphor. ‘For me intimacy is like a diamond’. This metaphoric construction serves the dual
purpose of allowing the many facets of intimacy to be spoken of as if emanating from the
one central object while a particular value is also being assigned to the object. As a precious
and genuine stone a diamond is the hardest of all naturally occurring substances and one of
the most valued. The implication here is that intimacy is also naturally occurring and holds
inherent value. But like gold and silver as classic markers of wealth, the value of a diamond is
not inherent in the object itself but is a matter of human judgement and therefore contingent
(Foucault, 1970). The diamantine image is a vivid metaphor for an insoluble and cherished
intimacy whose value is also a matter of human judgement but at the same time placed
beyond doubt. Via this metaphoric association couple-intimacy is here constructed as an
object of wealth and pleasure: a pleasure that comes with discovering it, of holding it to the
light and seeing its true value. And as the transparent diamond of intimacy is held to the light
a particular view of the similarly transparent subject as the possessor of truth is bought into
view.

Many constructions of intimacy that recur as people talk about the practice are articulated in
Tyler’s extract. Foremost is the ‘intimate’ process of exposing, explaining and divulging
oneself: the requirement to tell all, make secrets (‘unspoken things’) known, and to speak the
‘honest’ truth. It is this particular construction and function of intimacy as a further regime
of truth that will serve as a focus for this current analysis. Also flagged up in this extract are
the common constructions of intimacy as the sharing of life’s experience, as a process of
self, mutual discovery and growth, and as a symbiotic ‘personality meld’. In this one piece of
text intimacy is depicted as a process that enables a ‘fullness’ of life experience, as a
transcendental (romantic) experience of relational ‘oneness’, and as a process of individual-
mutual ‘truth telling’ and of a self-disclosure that is implicitly construed as that which
produces ‘full selves’. It seems advantageous, then, to deconstruct couple-intimacy as a coherent and unitary psychological process or capacity and to reconceptualise it as a discursive practice located at the point where discourses of subjective ‘truth’ and ‘authenticity’, historic and philosophic principles of containment and socio-politically fashioned ways of being-in-the-world converge to make the experience delineated as ‘intimacy’ possible. In aiming to do so, in this next section I propose a challenge to the value of a delineated ‘lover intimacy’ as a unique and particularly profound form of intimacy.

7.3 De-naturalising the diamond

Within psychology, Masters et al (1982), Branden (1981), Aron and Westbay (1996), Prager (1995, 2000) and Mackey et al (2000), among many, all refer to a distinct couple-intimacy wherein the joys, benefits and fulfilments of a generalised intimacy are said to be most acute and profound. In this ‘stratification of intimacy’ (Gabb, 2001) that privileges the couple as the exclusive context for ‘profound’ intimacy, there is implied the problematic and exclusionary assumption that people without partners are essentially precluded from the experience of ‘true’, complete intimacy and thus from the completeness of life itself.

“[W]e can expect that intimacy without romance or sexual interaction…is apt to be quite different from the intimacy that accompanies love or romance or sexual passion.”

(Masters et al, 1982: 234)

Here a generalised intimacy is differentiated from a specified couple-intimacy that is said to be unique because it involves both love and sex. As such, the later is constructed implicitly as a privileged form of intimacy, taking on unique qualities and characteristics in the couple domain as alluded to in the following extracts.

*Michael [G/NM1/ND]: […]* And I don’t mean a ‘friend’ comfortable or a soul mate, to a point a soul mate but not, I mean more of a lover sort of intimacy.

*Rebecca [L/M]: Um, I think intimacy really, well for me in ninety-nine percent of the time comes with a sexual relationship and that’s what’s good about sex. I suppose you might have a sort of intimate relationship with a parent or something but I’m not really that intimate with my friends anywhere like I would be with a lover.
Brian \(G/NM1\): It’s um, you know, the difference between intimacy with a friend and intimacy with your lover is keeping that fullness with just your lover.

Max \(H/NM2\): I guess there’s a different kind of love between your partner and the love you have for friends and family. / MF: mm / Um, and they’re probably displayed in a very similar way except for the sexual side I guess. The emotional is perhaps almost identical but you have sex with your partner and you don’t have sex with your friends and your family.

Here a ‘lover intimacy’ is spoken of as being different from other forms of intimacy that can be experienced with family and friends. Coupledom, then, is privileged as encapsulating an exclusive, unique, and context-specific kind of intimacy. While talking about emotion as being ‘similar’ across various intimate contexts, Max (like Rebecca) specifies difference from other intimacies as being a matter of sexual relations that can be had with a partner/lover but not with friends and family. Thus couple-intimacy is constituted as the manifestation of a ‘special’ form of intimacy/love in that it is allied with, and produced through sex. It is sex that produces a ‘fullness’ of intimacy that is, therefore, attributed exclusively to couples.

While emotional intimacy will be explored later in this chapter as a particular ‘regime of truth’ (Foucault, 1978a), the point here is that ‘sex’ is constituted implicitly as a warrant for, and demonstration of, the ‘specialness’ of lover intimacy and the ‘truth’ of this in the relational contexts of both sexual monogamy and sexual/emotional non-monogamy. Sex, however, is spoken of as differentiating a ‘lover’ from a ‘non-lover’ intimacy not because sex is in and of itself an expression of love, as generally believed (e.g. Branden, 1981; Masters and Johnson, 1970), or because sex and romantic love are inherently linked constructs (Hendrick and Hendrick, 2000) but because sex is culturally prohibited in other kinds of intimate relations. That is to say, sex becomes a crucial component of the differentiated couple-intimacy because of culturally constructed emotions, norms and moralised prohibitions that restrict ‘meaningful’ sex to the domain of loving coupledom. In accounting for Foucault’s (1978a) argument that the ‘truth’ of one’s ‘sex’ significantly configures the ‘truth’ of the person (as discussed below), and also that intimacy is likewise construed as a prime site for the ‘truth’ of people and relationships (as seen in chapter four), it follows that sex and couple-intimacy as mutually reinforcing regimes of truth are so intricately linked and euphemistically collapsed – a linkage that makes sense only in relation to certain historical, cultural and discursive conditions rather than on its own terms.
As Swain (1989) points out, ‘intimacy’ has been associated with sex in several studies. Helgeson et al (1987), for example, report a strong association between intimacy and sexual involvement (in same and cross-sex relationships) as if such an association is a naturally occurring one anterior to discourse and the cultural story-telling that euphemistically conflates intimacy with love and sex. More recently, Parks and Floyd (1996) state that half of their sample referred to sexual interaction as that which characterises loving and intimate relationships. What is being ‘revealed’ by such reporting, however, is not the truth of a specialised couple-intimacy and its nature. As stipulated in the semantic history of chapter four, meanings of sex, love and intimacy came to be collapsed particularly during the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as a result of Judeo-Christian tradition and bourgeois sensibility (aesthetics) that would have all three performed as the one act; that is, as necessarily summoning and incorporating each other in the ‘full’ expression of marital closeness and in the complete revelation of the ‘truth’ of oneself and another (see Hollway’s [1989] interpretation of the ‘have-hold’ discourse wherein sex and emotion are collapsed and sex thereby constituted as a highly meaningful act).

Tricia [H/M]: And often there’s a feeling of love behind it {intimacy}.

Joe [H/M]: And it’s about showing I guess one of the ultimate areas of love, and that’s intimacy.

Tyler [H/NM2/ND]: When I’m thinking of intimacy I’m thinking of romantic love, being in love. / MF: mm / And I just sort of assume it’s the sort of thing that doesn’t build up that much except in a physically intimate, um, sexual relationship.

Robert [H/M]: Ar, I sort of look at intimacy as in when, you know, I might be having sex and making love, intimacy to me is the feeling of love and the seeing, you know, of God, I don’t know, looking into someone’s eyes and seeing something there.

Ricky [G/M]: It {sex} is the most profound type of intimacy. I just think giving myself to somebody else is about as raw as it gets.

For these monogamous and non-monogamous participants, love, sex and intimacy are all bound together. A profound form of intimacy is related to, and manifested through, both sex and love. All three together are talked about as providing a window to the soul and the ‘rawness’ of self. But as the naturalised association between sex, love and intimacy is brought
into question, as it was in chapter four (cf. Foucault, 1978a; and Simon, 1996), then the uniqueness of a couple-intimacy seen to be predicated on this association can itself be problematised. On this basis one can begin to reinterpret couple-intimacy as a discursive construct that is made intelligible against, while it also reinforces, the socio-moral thinking that precedes it and which lays the ground for the discursive and thus conceptual alignment of intimacy, sex and love. To restate, this special-ised couple-intimacy does not encapsulate the ‘truth’ of either love, sex or intimacy so much as illustrate ways in which these have been featured and made to converge in the moralising discourses of romance and monogamous marital and married-like relationships.

That couple-intimacy is also constructed (and specialised) as that which encapsulates a particularly ‘private’ and ‘exclusive’ knowing conveyed by private modes of speech is likewise a condition and product of our cultural heritage that from the sixteenth century privileged a favourable notion of exclusive privacy – one that in ensuing centuries came to be increasingly associated with the ‘homes’ of families and married couples. As Williams (1976) suggests, along with the favourable association of ‘privacy’ and ‘privilege’ that developed at this time, ideas of withdrawal and seclusion came to be replaced by notions of ‘intimacy’ and a ‘privacy’ of ‘home’ gained hierarchical ascendency over a dichotomised notion of a ‘public’ realm (see chapter five). Concerning couple relationships, Shotter (1993a; cf. Stephenson et al, 2000) also foregrounds the private-public dualism as a condition of intimacy, arguing that a couple’s ‘private’ manner of speaking is what constitutes the experience of a private/intimate knowledge of ourselves and each other. This is amply demonstrated in the following extracts.

Ken [H/M]: Intimacy’s a private thing.

Geraldine [H/M]: Intimacy is um, I guess sharing that private moment.

Barbara [L/NM2]: Um, I think intimacy is more a closeness or a sharing between two people that no one else is a party two. Something private.

Robert [H/M]: Intimacy is sharing close things with your partner that you only want them to know versus someone else.

MF: Next word: intimacy.
Tricia [H/M]: [...] um, sharing um, very personal thoughts and feelings with a person that you wouldn’t necessarily tell your girlfriend. Just in a, yeah, just having a private moment where you might say something that’s very close to you and very personal.

Rachael [H/M]: I think intimacy is something that um, intimacy is where you honestly talk about things. Well to me intimacy is where you talk to your partner about things that you would never talk to anyone else about. Like very private things, very, sometimes things that you would never ever tell anyone else about. To me that’s intimacy.

Here couple-intimacy is romantically constructed as a private/exclusive sharing and knowing; a knowing that is assumed to be all the more ‘truthful’ because it is deemed ‘private’ (Stephenson et al, 2000). In the latter three extracts this private sharing is specified as the sharing of personal information and is made highly context specific. That is, there is a private sharing that is ‘unique’ to couples as things are said (and done) to a lover that would not be said in other intimate contexts. In the discursive practice of couple-intimacy, as in constructions of dyadic containment and commitment, a very private and exclusive kind of relationship is created that ‘versus’ the outside/public world. But in this privileged exclusivity and privacy that others are not privy to it’s as if a sense of privacy is ironically made known by the very acknowledgement of those excluded others such that the absented others secretly and parasitically exist in the circumscribed privacy from which they are ostensibly excluded.¹ Here then, as in constructions of dyadic exclusivity and containment (see chapter five), talk of an intimate privacy also involves reference to those who are excluded and, as such, is afforded its hierarchical value while bringing into focus, and being dependent upon, the ‘absented’ others from which a private intimacy distinguishes itself. To reiterate an earlier point made in chapter five, ‘private’ and ‘public’ are not in actual fact distinct and bounded ‘realities’ but, like the spatial delineations of ‘inner’ and ‘outer’, remain compelling metaphors and linguistic terms “that facilitate and articulate a set of fantasies, feared and desired” (Butler, 1990: 134) – a socio-historic and politically contingent assemblage of spaces that make sense only with reference to the desired fantasy of contained, fixed and stable structures/subjects and the feared fantasy of chaos and superficiality (Deleuze and Guattari, 1977, 1980).

¹ See Derrida’s (1976) discussion of ‘invagination’ where the second and subjugated term of a binary opposition (e.g. ‘public’, ‘jealousy’) secretly resides in and ascribes meaning to the privileged first term (e.g. ‘private’, ‘security’) in order to fulfil a lack in, and confirm the status of, the first.
As Epstein (1994) says of an argument posed by Shils (1966), the phenomenon of privacy exists only in contexts where interaction and communication with outsiders (the public) is possible. It is that Tricia and Rachael could tell others what they say to their lovers but don’t, that a sense of private intimacy with a partner is knowable. Thus the constitutive ‘intimate privacy’ of coupledom exists not only where communication with outsiders is possible but also because of cultural mores around what can (and should/should not) be said and to whom in a private-public flow of information. Like dyadic containment, then, intimacy is not solely about an exclusive, internal and private space but is also about the other spaces and public forces that are ‘external’ to it, that shape it, define it, and impact on it. And these intersecting and productive forces open up a manifold of private “wishes, desires and pleasures to a plethora of new regulatory forms [that are] no less powerful for being ‘decoupled’ from the authoritative prescriptions of the public powers” (Rose, 1989: 229). By this we can take Rose to mean that the productive power relations and disciplines mobilised by the discursive illusion of opposing ‘private’ and ‘public’ realms govern what is said and not said, done or not done, disclosed and not disclosed in each context and, as such, the forms of communication, desires, pleasures and subjectivity permitted and practiced in the ‘private’ nest of coupledom are not exempt from external regulation or public influence by virtue of the ‘private’ context.

In chapter five mention was also made of the formative relationship between the cultural practice of intimacy and the spatialising architecture of the modern domicile (Stone, 1977; De Swaan, 1990). There it was stipulated that the material, private, and domestic context of ‘home’ produced “the facilities and the constraints for the creation and maintenance of intimate relations” (De Swaan, 1990: 184). Thus many contemporary assumptions about intimacy can be seen as being the effects of an architectural and bourgeois qualification of ‘home’, with one major assumption being that emotional behaviours are ‘privately’ controlled and hidden from the outside world, only to be revealed in particular settings with specific people (De Swaan, 1990). In these terms, intimacy as a positively construed private and exclusive experience is not simply a naturally occurring characteristic or benefit of the practice, but a phenomenon made possible by a particular historically specific norm (or model) of architecture as much as anything else.
Anthropologists have similarly argued that ‘privacy’ is an expression of cultural values and associated with changes in the structure of Western society (e.g. Epstein, 1994). In regards to the positive valuing of ‘privacy’, Bettelheim has recognised cross-cultural differences and historical contingency and thus questions the Western assumption of the ‘goodness’ of privacy.

“I have come to accept that privacy is not universally desired, nor an absolute good, as I wished to believe. Instead, its high valuation belongs very much to a particular style of life and historical period, is further characteristic of certain social classes, and is thus culture-bound.”

(Bettelheim, 1979; cited in Epstein, 1994: 1).

This statement stands in contrast to psychology’s depiction of privacy as a universally desired human aspiration. The ‘psychology’ of a privatised intimacy can rather be viewed as being specific to Western society and the rise of the free and autonomous individual who acquires a ‘right’ to privacy (in body, mind, and a room of one’s own) as an expression of freedom and personal expression (Shweder and Bourne, 1984). At the same time, as Foucault (1977a) argues, a normalising discipline of visibility with its techniques of examination and surveillance that targeted this emergent ‘interiorised’ and spatialised subjectivity ascribed to the individual of modern humanism came to the fore as a central principle of regulation and governance (see below). Privacy, then, serves as a device for defining and protecting the boundaries and rights of the individualised, liberal ‘self’ (Epstein, 1994) while such a ‘self’ – disciplined and normalised in the process - also makes the conception of privacy possible. As such, the enablement of couple-intimacy is also ontological (dependent on who and what we see ourselves as ‘being’ in a particular logic of ‘identity’) and a matter of democratic politics and civil liberty. Indeed, “[h]ow we conceptualise ‘the person’ is a political issue with distinct consequences for the ways in which we experience and understand our feelings and behaviours” (Malson, 1998: 156). Hall makes a similar point when referring to the ‘logic of identity’ and how it frames ways in which we view the world:

“Now this logic of identity is very important to a whole range of political, theoretical and conceptual discourses…[T]he logic of the language of identity is extremely important to our own self-conceptions…There is something guaranteed about that logic of identity. It gives us a sense of depth, out there, and in here. It is spatially organized. Much of our discourse of the inside and the outside, the self and the
other, of the individual and society, of the subject and the object, are grounded in that particular logic of identity."

(Hall, 1997: 43)

The point here is that ‘intimacy’ as we know it is symptomatic of self-contained and self-conscious individualism, of a sense of private space, of subjective depth, and of a liberalist framing of civil liberties that stem from this logic, or discourse, of ‘identity’. It is a logic of contained subjectivity and inner-identity that enables an ‘intimacy’ constructed as something that produces an ‘openness’ and ‘exposure’ of inner-selves in the private telling of and making visible the secrets of that historically specific ‘inner-self’. Recurrent images of ‘openness’, ‘disclosure’, ‘exposing’ and ‘divulging’ that are all commonly drawn on by participants and used in psychological literature to define and describe ‘intimacy’ are images that are made available, authorised and deployed because of an already-in-place subject who harbours a private ‘inner-realm’ that can be exposed and known. On this ontological condition that presupposes a private, unified subjectivity of inner-depth, intimacy as a can-opener of inner realms, secrets truths and ‘real selves’ takes its form and warrant. Thus to locate couple-intimacy as psychological function or individual capacity and to conceive it as an inevitable aspect of human behaviour and desire is to overlook the socio-historical and political constitution of the construct/practice and its ontological basis.

The subsequent sections of this chapter provide an analysis of the discursive practice of couple-intimacy that further accounts for its ontological, socio-historic, and political specificity, and in particular its power as a device for unearthing ‘truth’ and producing ‘authenticity’. As a preface to this, it is necessary to first outline something of the assumed nature and function of the ‘truth’ and ‘authenticity’ that latter sections will highlight as being central themes (discourses) in the constitutive power-knowledge of intimacy and its urge to tell.

7.4 Doing truth, being authentic

The modernist and existential idea of authenticity - being ‘true to oneself’ and developing a ‘genuine identity’ – is indeed a culturally valued and aspired-to personal quality (Widdicombe, 1993; Holt and Griffin, 2003). But on its way to becoming such a culturally entrenched ethic the discursive principle of authenticity and its relationship to truth can be seen
as first being framed by the Enlightenment belief in an authentic, genuine ‘truth’ that came
to be centred in autonomous individuals as subjects of knowledge and as possessors of a
truth that can thus be sincerely spoken of and revealed in statements, actions and
judgements (Løvlie, 1992). Here truth is tied to both the self-knowing subject (as the object
of knowledge) and to the spoken word (with the privileging of the spoken word as being
‘more present’ than written language; Derrida, 1978). That is, truth inheres in the spoken
word (phonocentrism) such that I (as the possessor of knowledge and truth) am able to speak
the truth and hear (see) it in others. And as I speak my truth, my truth (myself) is confirmed
and I am made authentic in the utterance. In the individualist discourse of a self-contained
Cartesian subject who can know him/herself in a body, mind and soul that remain their
truth and no one else’s, the concepts of ‘authenticity’ and ‘truth’ are synonymous. Each refer
to a genuine ‘reality’ that is thought to exist in the deep recesses of a ‘self’ who is attributed a
unitary, relatively static and ultimately knowable ‘identity’, ‘personality’, or ‘essence’ (Hirst
Enlightenment logic, one’s ‘essence’ is where one’s ‘authenticity’ is believed to reside - an
authenticity that can be spoken of and which is revealed through speech as the natural bearer
of truth. Hence, as suggested in chapter four, it is this essence that is necessarily penetrated,
‘truthfully’ disclosed and spoken of in the establishment of an authenticity or truth of ‘self’
and ‘intimacy’ can be interpreted as a particular mechanism in the production of this truth.

Since its formulation by the “twin civilising agents of European Enlightenment - science and
humanism” (Stainton Rogers et al, 1995: 16) - the principle of ‘authenticity’ has been
psychologised as the state of ‘being known’ with the best way of achieving this said to be the
verbal sharing of one’s inner experience, particularly emotional experience (Laurenceau et al,
1998). In that this ‘being known’ is assumed to be the basis of inter-subjective connections
and the foundation of good mental health (e.g. Menzies and Davidson, 2002), the
‘authenticity’ that being known by oneself and an-other allegedly confirms is likewise linked
to ‘psychological adjustment’ and fulfilling relationships (e.g. Fromm, 1957; Prager, 1995;
Prager and Buhmester, 1998). In the current discourse of authenticity a number of key
beliefs are assumed that reflect the phonocentrism of nineteenth century (and contemporary)
thought as outlined above. These include the ideas that the human subject is foremost a
subject of self-knowledge and truth; that authenticity can be developed as an individual
quality or way of ‘being’; that it reflects the truth of a real/total self that is revealed in ‘good’
(truthful) communication; that there exists (by association) a ‘false’ self that can be overcome by being authentic; and that authenticity allows us to feel connected and enables others to connect with us when we know and speak the truth of who we are (see Menzies and Davidson, 2002). In short, authenticity is valued as a psychological principle in that it works to contain, make certain and thus stabilise identity and self-knowledge according to one (already prescribed) ‘truth’ of Being. When we feel our identities to be unstable, when we do not go on being the same as we were before, there is the danger of becoming ‘inauthentic’ which develops, it is believed, because a lurking ‘false self’ has triumphed over a ‘true self’ (Menzies, 2001).

Many have theorised this opposition between ‘true and false’ selves, and in various ways. For example, Heidegger (1962), the existential philosopher most associated with the concept of authenticity, proposes that each of us gains an ‘identity’ from our situation and environment (from our family and culture, for example). But, he argues, to let one’s values, beliefs and goals remain fixed by one’s socio-cultural environment without critical reflection is to remain ‘inauthentic’. In contrast, the ‘authentic’ individual (reminiscent of the neo-liberal entrepreneur) is aware of one’s freedom, takes responsibility for their own life and actions, welcomes change, and makes choices about identity. Yet for Heidegger, ‘inauthenticity’ is not entirely overcome-able as the practical necessities of life make critical reflection difficult. Furthermore, the idea of being ‘authentic’ in ways he understands it is for Heidegger something that terrifies us and so we retreat into inauthenticity and falseness seeking to contrive an experience of certainty and control where there actually is none. That is, as we strive to gain ‘control’ and achieve a socially constructed version of ‘security’ we become inauthentic because we are not making our own choices but assimilating conventional priorities and living by the dictates of others. Similarly, psychoanalytic theorist Winnicott (1960) sees a ‘false’ self developing from community living, moral norms and from ‘doing the right thing’ in polite society.

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2 See Tseêlon’s (1991) critique of Snyder’s self-monitoring scale (a self-presentation personality measure) as assuming a rhetoric of authenticity whereby ‘self’ measurement of this kind, like any empiricist coding practice, argues Tseêlon, defines the terms through which we have come to view and explain the world and ourselves. As such, measurement of this type is no simple matter of ‘accuracy’ but a question of ontological and epistemological value – the application of which constructs the assumed reality of ‘self-authenticity’ purportedly being measured and reinforces it as a particular metaphor of human behaviour.
A marked difference, however, between Heidegger and Winnicott is that the former sees the security of authenticity – one dependent on an unbroken narrative of ‘self’ - as itself a construction of the world and how we see ourselves (as being contained and certain), while Winnicott (and psychology more generally) view authenticity as a way of gaining control and a sense of security that are possible as we develop and make certain our contained identities and know security through it. I flag up this conceptual difference as a way of bringing to light the psychological construction of authenticity as being about gaining control and security (as opposed to Heidegger’s view where no such things are possible). Winnicott, psychology, and theories of intimacy (e.g. Jourard, 1964, 1971; Prager, 1995, 2000) that assimilate this realist perspective of authenticity assume (in some form or another) Bowlby’s (1969) notion of the ‘secure base’ – that security and good mental health develop from a contained, predictable environment where the exploration of one’s ‘true self’, similarly contained, and the process of self-affirmation are allowed to flourish (see chapter two). The psychology of intimacy works to delineate a ‘secure base’ in terms of a contained emotional environment that is privileged as necessary for an ‘authentic’ and contained ‘truth’ of selves and its comfortable disclosure. In Derrida’s words, the unbroken narrative of ‘self’ and ‘identity’ that intimacy advances in the name of authenticity, health and security “affords a reassuring certitude...[and] on the basis of this certitude anxiety can be mastered” (Derrida, 1978: 279).

In the conventional discourse of authenticity, and in the particular kind of disclosing intimacy it warrants and prescribes, a certainty of selves and relationships is prioritised and in intimacy, as in all other relational practices so far explored, can be detected a modernist compulsion to generate order from disorder (Yngvesson and Mahoney, 2000). As suggested in the previous chapter, traditional notions of ‘order’ and ‘security’ (to do with the ‘freedoms’ of certainty, constancy and predictability) are predicated on liberalist constructions of disorder and threat and are thus both historically and politically specific notions (Hacking, 1990; Buzan et al, 1998). The idea of a ‘security’ that dispels fear recurs again in psychological and everyday constructions of intimacy, as the following extracts illustrate.

*Michael [G/NM1/ND]*: It {intimacy} means having and being completely comfortable with someone. To a point where you can say what you want or do what you want without fear of am I doing the right thing?
Dominic [H/M]: (...) Intimacy (...) Sharing things without fear of judgment [...] And I don't fear, I don't fear that she's going to criticise me or ostracise me or not be my friend or my lover, my partner any more. That is intimacy.

Here intimacy is constructed as providing a comfortable and secure environment that facilitates open communication and a freedom of action that are afforded particular value against an assumed fear (of uncertainty, non-constancy) that intimacy is construed as countering (e.g. Fromm, 1957; Prager, 1995; Prager and Burhmester, 1998). As in the psychological construction of ‘authenticity’ (and also partly because of it), intimacy and the security it supposedly assures are spoken of as the absence of fear, doubt and uncertainty – the very security that Heidegger views as a mark of ‘inauthenticity’ or a synthetic version of authenticity which, he argues, is not realisable in these terms. For Derrida also this fundamental ground of certitude is always “beyond the reach of play” (Derrida, 1978: 279) by which we can take him to mean that the realist claim of ‘authenticity’ as being a search for certitude is a misdirected one. Likewise for Lacan (1949) a symbolic ‘order’ as a consistent, predictable and closed totality does not exist. Certainty and regularity of thought, emotions and conduct (Dominic’s partner must go on being the same for him if he is to go on being unafraid and the same as before) are spoken of in these extracts as being generated and assured in the facilitating environment or space of intimacy. And it is precisely the synthetic nature of the ‘certitudes’ generated therein that this analysis calls into question, not least because of the kinds of ‘authenticity’ and ‘truth’ that feeling unafraid, certain and free require of ‘intimates’ who are more than made merely certain in and by these things but more thoroughly produced, regulated and disciplined by them.

One further observation is that Michael and Dominic are able to sense and express intimacy because of what their partners do and don’t do. Again Heiddeger (1962) can be drawn on to deconstruct this kind of intimacy that is not simply about one’s own truth, or an intersubjective truth, but is also generated by the operation of what Heidegger calls the inauthentic ‘they-self’ (das Man-selbst). In short, the ‘they-self’ attains (false) authentic status and can know intimacy not by an access to ‘truth’ or ‘certainty’ but via a continued comparison with and dependency on others that is produced and made necessary because of the kind of egocentric creature the individualised subject (Dasein) first sees itself as being in an allocated subjective isolation and privacy. Thus, on the basis of this way of being-in-the-world, intimacy emerges not as a vehicle for authentic truth so much as the means of
comparison and dependency where an unstable ‘truth’ is fashioned. As an alleged avenue for authentic truth and surety, intimacy does not enable these things through direct disclosures of selves, or via an abstract ‘closeness’, but by means of mutual comparison and dependency wherein coupled subjects are required to remain the same (reliable, predictable, constant) in order for intimacy (like commitment and trust) to achieve its mission of salvation from the very fears and insecurities it simultaneously fabricates, refers to and encapsulates.

So when he argues that ‘All truth is relative to Dasein’s being’, Heidegger (1962) is making a statement to do with the inextricable relationship between Being and Truth such that the truth of authenticity believed to be gained by, and manifested in, intimate practices and its generative modes of speech (truth-telling) can be understood as an ontological issue, or in other words, in terms of the kind of Being we first see ourselves as being. To re-emphasise the argument being posed, ‘intimacy’ is re-theorised here as no naturally occurring, inevitable result of ‘being human’ but as conditional on the kind of human who has first been installed into the current socio-historically specific social/political realm; one who has been endowed with an ‘inner truth’ and the capacity to speak it, who has been ascribed a particular identity, body, interior, set of characteristics, instincts, desires and expressions and who deploys the mechanism of intimacy in the production of his/her truth. Given that power is exercised through the production of truth (Nietzsche, 1887a; Foucault, 1980), an intimacy that produces, categorises, and observes ‘truth’ is also the exercise of power which, as discussed below, functions within an economy of visibility to produce us as disciplined individuals. It is into-me-see as the exercise of multiple forms of power which produce and discipline (that is, individualises and normalises) the intimate subject that this analysis now goes on to explore by first outlining in this next section two distinct yet related operations of power as Foucault (1977a) theorises them in his (post sixteenth century) ‘economy of visibility’.

7.5 Confessions and surveillances of in(ti)mates

As discussed in chapter four, the Enlightenment project that produced the ‘individual’ as a transparent object of knowledge and as the locus and confessor of ‘truth’ also invented the disciplines, that is, the set of instruments, techniques, procedures and technologies that increase both the docility and utility of the individual while reducing multiplicity, dispersion and mobility (Foucault, 1977a). Intimacy, I argue, like couple-containment, commitment and
trust, is one such instrument of the regularising, anti-nomadic disciplines that dominated social relations from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. And from this time, according to Foucauldian theory, discipline took on two distinct yet complementary forms – the confession and surveillance, both of which, as the following analysis illustrates, are acutely operationalised in the discursive practice of couple-intimacy.

Further to Foucault’s distinction between pre-Classical and Classical forms of disciplinary power/politics, in the ‘economy of visibility’, ‘political anatomy of detail’ or ‘subjection by illumination’ that he associates with the latter period, emerges two organisations of visibility that from the late eighteenth century began to detail the disciplined individual in two distinct, yet related ways. The first, according to Foucault (1980), is the confessional and self-disclosing communication of self. This particular discipline of visibility builds on Rousseau’s revolutionary romantic dream of a transparent society and populace where there are no zones of darkness or disorder, where hearts should openly communicate their vision unobstructed by obstacles, and where communal opinion should “reign over each” (Foucault, 1980: 152). Here power is exercised by virtue of things being collectively known, agreed to, and assimilated by the individual. According to Foucault (1978a) the discursive ritual of confession (particularly in relation to sexual knowledge and conduct) has since at least the Middle Ages become one of the West’s most prized technologies for the production of truth. As such the confession – moving from being a renunciation of self to being recoded as a therapeutic operation from the nineteenth century - is a crucial aspect of a therapeutic intimacy that works to self-actualise, produce truth and have these announced, with the production and the announcement being concomitant.

“One confesses in public and in private, to one’s parents, one’s educators, one’s doctor, to those one loves: one admits to oneself, in pleasure and in pain, things it would be impossible to tell anyone else … One confesses – or is forced to confess.”

(Foucault, 1978a: 59)

For Foucault, the confession is a significant ritual of discourse and truth, an obligatory mode of speech and form of power-knowledge that unfolds within relations of power since confession occurs in the presence of another who is not simply the listener but “the authority who requires the confession, prescribes and appreciates it, and intervenes in order
to judge, punish, forgive, console and reconcile” (ibid.: 61-2). This, then, is a ritual that produces modifications in those who confess (as well as in those who fail to confess) and who are exonerated and liberated, yet also effectively disciplined by their confession. In the act of intimate talk and confession, in this ritualistic form of communication that is inextricably tied to the disciplinary ‘economy of visibility’, discipline occurs as the ‘truth’ and value of ‘self’ is produced and made visible via the speech of a self-disclosing and all-confessing intimacy. In the ritual of a confessing intimacy, every detail that determines, divides or is lacking in the confessing subject is brought to the surface and made known in the presence of another who listens, responds, confirms, absolves and authenticates.

Speaking of an instance where his partner was ‘unfaithful’ and ‘needed’ to confess, Ricky exemplifies an aspect of the disciplinary effect and power relations at work in intimate confession and truth-telling.

*Ricky (G/M):* In the fact that he {Ricky’s partner Allan} felt compelled to tell me, basically front up to it, I was able to take some solace in that somehow it was important. Um, and it was very important for me to know that he couldn’t do that glibly [...] In respecting my {monogamous} position he needed to honestly tell me which was, I think, a key feature for me dealing with it [...] It was basically my call as to how I could deal with it. But it took courage on his part.

In this truncated extract discipline and power are at work in a mode of communication that withholds nothing by omission. A moral and political duty to confess, as prescribed by the discourses of truth and authenticity, requires that no detail is left unspoken in a compulsion to tell. Of significance here is that as Allan ‘fronted up’ and ‘felt compelled to tell’, Ricky talks of being able to ‘take some solace’. Ricky’s comfort resulted from a confession that confirms Allan’s respect for him and their monogamous relationship and that also serves to establish Allan as the courageous confessor and (re)validate him in his transparent truth. By his confession, Allan is authenticated as courageous, respectful and honest and he regains power as a worthy individual. Thus Allan’s apparent compulsion to tell establishes multiple lines of power inasmuch as he is reconfirmed as an honourable, authentic individual who shows himself as not able to ‘glibly’ repeat the act, and Ricky is elevated to the authoritative position of moral overseer, judge, absolver and decision maker with the value of his belief in monogamy being legitimised.
The point to be emphasised from this reading of the extract is that detail of a sexual misdemeanour is not simply being uncovered in this confession. Rather self-knowledge, truth and authenticity are for both parties being established by this intimate ‘disclosure’. As such there is pleasure to be had from this confession that draws out knowledge and authenticates (Nietzsche, 1887a; Foucault, 1985): a pleasure of intimate speech that comes with knowing the truth of oneself and another, “of discovering and exposing it, the fascination of seeing it and telling it, of captivating and capturing others by it, of confiding it in secret, of luring it out in the open” (Foucault, 1978a: 71). As a (sexual) truth is captured here both subjects are simultaneously captured in it, disciplined (that is, constituted, objectified, confirmed) in accordance with the order of that truth, its knowledge, pleasure, its subjectification and its power. Discipline, in the way Foucault conceives it, is activated here by the intimate announcement and hearing of truth that registers and positions the subjects in dialogue, that confers and affirms identity, reduces difference and modifies, clears confusion and that identifies fault, absolves and authenticates. In this way the confession of disclosure can be understood as “a certain form of subjectification that binds us to others at the very moment we affirm our identity” (Rose, 1989: 24). That is, discipline results from the verbal production of truth (in this case the truth of monogamy and its breach) and by the self-affirmations, pleasures and powers that are exercised through the production of that truth. But discipline can also occur in a suppression of truth as illustrated in the next extract where Elizabeth accounts for a prior ‘infidelity’.

Elizabeth [L/M]: I suppose it bothers me a little bit that I haven’t, it does bother me that I haven’t told Sophia. I’d like to tell her (.) I feel there's a little bit of, I’ve been, perhaps I’ve been, I’d like to be honest, completely honest with her / MF: mm / about everything about me. But it, ah, but I can’t. […] I did put myself through an enormous amount of pain and guilt in not telling her to the point where I don’t know whether, I don’t know if it’s actually worth it. / MF: mm / To go through it again.

In a reading of this extract more can be said about the discipline of couple-intimacy in that it is not just organised around open and honest confessions of the transparent subject but in the ‘pain and guilt’ induced by not confessing – itself an effect of the duty to confess. Not sorry about the act itself so much as not being able to be honest and confess ‘everything about me’, regulation occurs here as the surveillance of conscience. In not being able to disclose the ‘infidelity’, the ‘pain and guilt’ produced by a suppression of truth leads
Elizabeth to see her non-monogamous activity and that ‘sexual side’ of herself (as she talks about elsewhere in her interview) as being ‘not actually worth it’. The power of conscience as an effect of the duty to confess can be theorised with respect to surveillance as a counterpart to (or aspect of) the discipline of confession.  

Foucault (1977a) further theorises the organisation of visibility in terms of a normalising gaze and constant (or continually possible) surveillance as epitomised by Bentham’s exemplar of discipline - the Panopticon. Here the “technical idea of an ‘all-seeing’ power is grafted onto the great Rousseauist theme” (ibid.: 152). In the Panopticon, visibility is mustered by a dominating, overseeing gaze and power is exercised by constant surveillance or its possibility. Briefly, Foucault (1977a) argues that the mode of observation and examination enabled by the generalisable principle of panopticism places the disciplined individual in a complex field of surveillance (or its possibility) wherein one is meticulously examined, documented and constituted. Placed in a cell that is visible to a central observation tower, each inmate knows or suspects that he or she is being watched and monitored such that one comes to assume responsibility for the operation of power and becomes “the principle of his own subjection” (Foucault, 1977a: 202). In the Panopticon, power is therefore anonymised by the suspicion of an inspecting gaze that one learns to internalise and act upon oneself as a matter of conscience, as illustrated in Elizabeth’s extract above.

“An inspecting gaze, a gaze which each individual under its weight will end by interiorising to the point that he is his own overseer, each individual then exercising this surveillance over, and against, himself.”

(Foucault, 1980: 155)

It is important, then, to understand the Panoptic metaphor of discipline not as a model for totalitarian control but as a model of productive power. It is a political technology that works to “induce a certain relation of human beings to themselves” (Rose, 1999: 242) whereby the subject comes to judge, modify and self-manage their own conduct according to

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3 While these extracts are illustrations of confessions in relation to ‘rule-breaking’ and breaches of monogamy, readers are referred to extracts below for illustrations of relational ‘confessions’ that are not about the telling of broken rules or guilt but the requirement to speak the honest truth about oneself and disclose every detail more generally.
socio-moral standards and norms of civility. In being transparent and obliged to confess, as well as being perpetually monitored by the possibility of the normalising gaze, in being ruled by the surveillance of truth (whether confessed or not), the disciplined subject is prevented from even the possibility of (undetected) wrong-doing and so the wish to commit wrong or act differently is significantly diminished.

With regards the private cell of couple-intimacy we can understand power as being organised around the related visible confessions and surveillances. In the ‘intimate’ corner of coupledom there is the transparent, contained, and interiorised subject who is obliged to announce every detail about themselves and is thereby individuated and confirmed as authentic. And there is also the overseeing partner (whether present or not) and the activation of a self-supervisory conscience. In other words, the requirements and power relations of intimacy are that each partner must confess to the other thus making themselves visible so that the other, in a sense, stands in the central viewing tower of the panoptic space of intimacy. Enabled and compelled by these disciplines are the regulations of an incitement to talk and confess (or conceal) truth, the pleasure of honestly communicating, of sharing ‘real’ selves, secrets and opinions, as well as the capability of being metaphorically ‘fused’ or ‘at one’ in the panoptic space of intimacy such that being monitored by another and by what one enact on oneself are conjoined and voluntarily enacted.

That the confession/visibility of intimacy requires more than just confessions of ‘wrongdoing’ and ‘rule-breaking’ is highlighted in Barry’s quote below.

*Barry [G/NM1/ND]:* {In this relationship} I became or started to think more openly about where I was coming from. / MF: mm / Um, and was encouraged by Andrew’s approach to it and therefore learnt from him. Learnt from what were those layers in a sense. He was identifying them and challenging me on them. I was reviewing them and genuinely beginning to let them go. And it took some time. / MF: mm / It wasn’t overnight. Um, but I did assess and evaluate. And revert to what I think is the more truer self than before.

Under the supervisory gaze of his partner Andrew and within a framework of what it means to be ‘open’ in a non-monogamous relationship, Barry talks of being able to reclaim his ‘truer’ self as he reviews and discards the layers of a previous (monogamous) subjectivity so as to gradually expose another more authentic kind. His is a fantasy of a present ‘real’ self
that has always existed but was previously hidden under falseness. Of significance is that Andrew’s overseeing is central to this discipline of assessment, evaluation and transformation as he ‘identifies’ and ‘challenges’ in this panoptic-like subjectification to the ‘truth’ of oneself.

In all that the imperative of intimacy requires, the in(ti)mates of coupledom are constituted and regulated in and by their transparencies/concealments, their authenticities, and by the architectural space of the (private) domicile wherein the couple exist and relate having already internalised the normalising gaze of power by being ‘fully’ intimate and ‘capable’ of its proper expression. And it is this panoptic-like internalisation of the mechanisms of disciplinary power that can be seen to produce the illusion of a private intimacy and its alleged freedom. Thus, as an active and modulating power-knowledge, into-me-see is vital to the government of selves, couples and social relations as it fixes, pacifies and constitutes subjects in confession to each other and places them under the voyeuristic gaze of a normalising truth and authenticity. These themes and mobilisations of disciplinary power are further demonstrated as people talk about a cell-like and confessional intimacy that renders them as ‘knowable’ and ‘known’.

7.6 Secret (dis)closures and illuminations

In the following two sections I consider ways in which power operates in the discursive field of a couple-intimacy that constitutes the disciplined subject in the ‘disclosing’ mode of talk/communication that into-me-see necessitates. The argument here is that self-disclosing intimacy serves to ‘open up’ and (re)confirm a particular consciousness of authenticity wherein the subject is made ‘known’ as a regular and coherent entity, as being always the same, and as willing to disclose, confess, and self-regulate.

Further to being constructed as a matter of exclusive privacy, couple-intimacy is also (similarly) construed and privileged as being about the exclusive sharing of secrets whereby the ‘real self’ is disclosed. As stipulated in the literature review of chapter two, self-disclosing intimacy as an access to self-mutual ‘knowing’ and to ‘real selves’ is one of the major themes in the psychology of intimacy which begins from the premise that open and honest self-disclosure is a common and necessary component of personal and relationship health (e.g.
Waring and Chelune, 1983). Indeed the open expression of one’s innermost secrets is central to Freud’s (1913) psychoanalytic cure and has remained an important aspect of psychotherapy. In the following quotes, couple-intimacy is talked about as being enabled by (and dependent on) the exclusive and context-specific sharing of secrets which again illustrates the visibilities of intimacy as being produced not only by confessions of wrongdoing but the disclosure of every detail about oneself.

Rodney [H/NM]: Like I think being intimate with her {Rodney’s partner} is, intimate comes into a lot of forms of play with us I think. Being intimate and um, delving into each other’s pasts, each other’s secrets.

Angela [H/M]: It {intimacy} is special. I mean things like nick names. I would, I think I would actually physically die if I ever heard some other girl calling Dominic by the nick name that I call him. I would die. / MF: mm / I would just, that would be it. I don’t think my life would be worth living (laughing). That’s how strongly I feel about it. Yeah, that’s intimacy. I don’t want anyone else to know that with Dominic. / MF: mm / Ever.

MF: And do you think other people knowing it or sharing it would spoil your intimacy with him?

Angela: Yeah, completely. Cause the whole secrecy of it is part of the fun. Part of the thing that makes it special. / MF: mm / I don’t know. I wouldn’t want to share that with anybody because it’s what makes people feel good about themselves. They’ve got something no one else knows about.

One of the ‘forms’ that intimacy takes on in Rodney’s and Angela’s relationships is an exclusive sharing of secrets that involves ‘delving into pasts’ and sharing details that are not necessarily known outside their relationships. For Angela the secrecy of intimacy, in regards to the exclusive calling of nicknames, is dramatised as a matter of life and death. But in Angela’s construction of intimacy there is a vivid public presence in the form of an excluded ‘other’. Again it’s as if a sense of intimacy is dependent not only on what is kept secret but on excluding the possibility of ‘some other girl’ knowing the secrets of the contained dyad. Here intimacy counters the presence of outside others while also calling upon those who are excluded as a confirmatory measure. The ‘specialness’ of what Angela knows can only be felt and expressed against what another is made not to know. This is what Barthes (1977: 140) can be read as referring to when he descriptively replaces the notion of an ‘intimate stage’ with the more apt image of a ‘crowded theatre’ wherein the presence of excluded others, of social and cultural mores around the flows of information and codes of conduct, and around ways of ‘being’ and ‘knowing’ are all necessary for a sense and practice of intimacy. And this
makes for a crowded and not so private theatre indeed when the curtain is raised on the
discursive practice of intimacy to highlight the external regulations, social consensus and
dependence on an ‘excluded outside’ that give meaning to, and impact on, its ostensible
privacy.

Furthermore, the ‘feeling good’ about oneself that Angela refers to can be interpreted as the
effect of a private and restricted knowing that confirms the sovereign status of the private
and contained individual, one whose very subjectivity hinges on the privilege of privacy and
containment (see Shotter and Gergen, 1989). It’s as if the Cartesian (ontological) subject,
already endowed with a private interiority and secret inner-depth, comes to ‘feel good’ by
having this ontologic condition confirmed and authenticated by way of an intimacy
conceived as ideally allowing access to one’s inner-most truth. So the ‘thing’ that makes
intimacy ‘special’ is an authenticity of self that privacy and the exchange of secrets produce: an
authenticity or genuine ‘truth’ that concerns what is known on the one hand and the status
of the subject on the other. The extracts below pick up on this crucial play of authenticity as
intimacy is being defined and described.

MF: Okay, intimacy.
Clare [H/NM2]: Ar, knowing and being known (.) More? / MF: yes please / Um, intimacy is where you are communicating with no concerns or barriers or defences.

Tyler [H/NM2/ND]: One facet of intimacy is that you are exposing a great deal of yourself. You’re explaining, divulging a great deal of yourself.

Peter [G/NM2]: Um, but intimacy on a sort of general level um, is like showing a little bit of your um, your real self to somebody.

Elizabeth [L/M]: [...] Intimacy is knowing, I think knowing someone particularly well, particularly ar, in a situation where someone knows you so well they know what
you’re thinking. I mean not all the time, but they know what you’re thinking. They
know what you’re about to say. They know what’s going on in your head. They know
how you’re going to react to a certain situation […] We’re both so in tune with each
other. Um, we know each other very well […] It’s um, it’s you allowing yourself to
open up I think, and share with someone else. / MF: mm / Really opening up who
you are to someone. It’s allowing yourself to emotionally, intellectually and physically
open yourself up with someone else. And to share that, the different sides. Or to
share yourself with someone else; who you are. That’s what I think intimacy is.
Here couple-intimacy is constructed as producing a ‘knowing and being known’, as a tool for the revelation and reciprocal sharing of an accessible ‘real self’ that is presumed to exist and which can be exposed, explained and accounted for in a telling that is not hindered by ‘concerns or barriers or defences’. In Elizabeth’s extract it is the mechanism of intimacy that brings the couple into ‘tune with each other’ and themselves, although in relation to an earlier extract (page 240) where Elizabeth gives an account of an unconfessed infidelity, the fine tuning she speaks of above is not a straightforward revelation of truth. In these extracts, the couple fine-tuning this intimacy operate as mechanics and mind readers as they engage in a mutual disclosure that produces a pleasurable and almost psychic familiarity. In the shared activity of ‘opening up’ on emotional, mental and physical levels each partner works to expose their inner authenticities (if only as fantasy) on every level of personhood as we have come to conceive it – in mind, body and soul. Elizabeth’s extract in particular can thus be read as an exemplar of panoptic-like surveillance and discipline, as can the following quote from Samantha.

Samantha [B/NM1]: Um, I think intimacy is about um, sharing a physical space and also sharing emotional space. And understanding, um, understanding someone’s emotions and how they feel and things like that. So, intimacy, what else? It’s about a connection I think. So it’s when you know what someone’s thinking.

In these accounts of intimacy there is minute mutual surveillance of visible and normalised individuals who are made necessarily regular, constant and predictable in every detail of thought, behaviour and feeling. Being ‘open’, then, does not merely facilitate connection, closeness or familiarity but warrants total exposure and surveillance of what’s going on in one’s head and allows for the production and normalising discipline of in(ti)mates as they share a physical and emotional panoptic space and connection. This is a physical and emotional ‘sharing’ in the name of intimacy that is constituted as another’s panoptic-like knowing of one’s every thought, emotion and possible reaction – a surveillance that, as Foucault (1977a) notes, doesn’t have to occur all the time but is assumed (and internalised) by the inmate as being permanent. As Elizabeth says of her occupancy of the intimate space she constructs, ‘they know what you’re thinking. I mean not all the time, but they know what you’re thinking’. That couple-intimacy produces a visible ‘real self’ who is to remain (relatively) fixed, constant and predictable in order for intimacy to be experienced is indicative of its power as a particular knowledge and way of viewing/knowing.
Within mainstream psychology there exists a body of literature that highlights the chameleonic and idealised nature of ‘intimate’ subjectivity and which fits uncomfortably with the notion of a mutual self-disclosure that is assumed to unearth a genuine, complete truth and knowledge of ‘real’ selves. In this body of research and theory the suggestion is that what we think we know about another, and what we think we are known as, is not so much representative of truth but idealised versions of selves and truth as we are oriented to positive ideals about ourselves and an-other (e.g. Blumstein, 1991; McDonald and Ross, 1999; Bosson and Swann, 2001). As Blumstein (1991) suggests, intimacy demands a sameness between the couple (and other dyads) that in turn demands a process of ‘reality creation work’ and self-production. Thus the ‘product’ of intimacy, as constructed in the above extracts, and as Heidegger argues (see section 7.4), is never ‘genuinely’ revealed through a process of self-disclosure but constituted through a series of self-modifications and adaptations upon which intimate closeness is made known and sustained.

Robert [H/M]: I sort of have this theory that when people start dating, when you start dating you’re all of a sudden ‘born again virgins’, in inverted commas. Right?

Allan [G/M]: He {Allan’s partner Ricky} told me that he wasn’t too keen on people who slept around and so I think at one stage that I did become a bit of a born again virgin. / MF: mm / As far as he was concerned […] There would be like a barrier between me and Ricky and the outside world […] I think I’d painted myself as being more white than off white. / MF: mm mm / And I didn’t want anything to spoil that. At the beginning I painted a different picture of myself to the one that actually existed. I’ve told him now. As we got more and more involved in the relationship things slipped out and I admitted more […] I did manipulate situations so he would perceive me as someone who was, you know, like him.

This construction of the ‘born again virgin’ of (monogamous) coupledom demonstrates the chameleonic nature of the subject who is becoming intimately involved with another and who sets out on the process of ‘reality creation work’ in order to be accepted as being the same as another. For Allan, the process of getting to know his partner on an intimate basis involved painting ‘a different picture of myself to the one that actually existed’. Essentially this meant giving Ricky the impression that his previous sexual experiences had been confined to relationships. In Allan’s extract intimacy is developed not through a process of honest self-disclosure and revelation of ‘truth’ but through strategic and deliberate manipulation and adaptation (Jamieson, 1999). The image of Allan ‘painting’ himself to be more like Ricky (according to Allan’s notion of Ricky) is vivid in terms of the chameleonic
subject who is re-shaped and re-constructed (Blumstein, 1991) in the performance of a self-disclosing intimacy that demands the presentation of a particular, socially acceptable self (Heidegger’s ‘they-self’). A particular ‘self’ is here being created and performed by virtue of an intimate relationship that warrants (sexual, moral) similarity and a version of truth that has to fit with another’s beliefs, values and expectations.

While both quotes construe an intimate self-disclosure as a created and dishonest version of oneself rather than straightforward revelation as Elizabeth and Samantha, for example, construct it, Allan’s extract seems to suggest a move from early dishonesty to later ‘true’ self-disclosure, thereby drawing on and confirming the traditional psychological conception of self-disclosing intimacy. His reference to an actual ‘self’ that exists underneath the manipulations and chameleonic mask he talks about as wearing in the early stages of his relationships parallels the problematic assumption that can be made in the ‘soft’ constructionist literature cited above (see also chapter two) wherein the agentic subject largely becomes a ‘dishonest’ version of an authentic ‘self’ hidden underneath. For example, when Jamieson (1999: 452) writes of an intimate closeness that is predicated on a “shared repertoire of cover stories, taboos, and self-dishonesty”, such as Allan describes, there is the implicit assumption that there are ‘really true’ stories to be told. Nevertheless, the point I wish to emphasis here is that as intimate ‘selves’ are necessarily interwoven and (more thoroughly) constituted in accordance with each other, intimacy is not so much about knowing a pre-existing ‘reality’ of self and other. Rather, through a set of constraints and social conventions - sexual morality and monogamy, for example - partners become more ‘intimate’ and more acceptable to one another as one kind of ‘truth’ is created, prioritised, and played out. Allan’s extract underscores an intimacy that is not so much a straightforward process of total, genuine self-disclosure (although he implies this occurs as the relationship develops), but one that is partial and conditional on other relationship practices. As in Elizabeth’s earlier extract (page 240), tension exists where intimacy, on the one hand, means complete self-expression but where sexual monogamy, on the other, dictates what can and cannot be said and made known. As such (dis)closing intimacy functions to produce subjective closure around a knowledge and truth that is to be revealed and performed because it is culturally and socially preferred and in(ti)mates are more thoroughly produced in this enactment rather than merely influenced.
Who we are being in intimate coupledom, then, is not so much our ‘true’ inner selves but rather a constructed self who is more shaped by the process than straightforwardly exposed. As outlined in chapter three, following the lead of Lacanian psychoanalysis, critical social psychology has thoroughly deconstructed the socio-historic notion of the unitary, self-conscious, self-contained and self-governing ‘self’ (e.g. Sampson, 1977; Henriques et al, 1984; Shotter and Gergen, 1989; Davies and Harré, 1990) as a ‘metaphysical fiction’ (Hirst and Woolley, 1982) that is produced by individualistic discourse (see chapters three and four). The ontological status of the ‘sovereign individual’ is challenged “as a particular product of historically specific practices of social regulation” (Henriques et al, 1984: 12; see also Foucault, 1973a, 1977a). Within a post-structuralist paradigm there is no subject who remains separate from the social realm or is merely influenced by it, the fluctuating subject is multiply constituted within it. The modernist idea of a contained subject at the centre of the world is “replaced by a provisional, contingent and constructed subject, a subject whose self-identity is constituted and reconstituted relationally” (Kvale, 1992: 14). Descartes’ idea of contained subjectivity, Rousseau’s notion of the confessing ‘authentic’ subject and Kant’s advancement of the ‘transcendental ego’ are all rejected and “instead we get fragments or ‘fractals’ of reason and an anonymous individual submitted to the play of structure, power or narrativity” (Løvlie, 1992: 123).

The idea, then, of an individualising and psychologised ‘intimacy’ that results from a disclosure of ‘inner truth’ leading to self-actualisation and relational security does not hold up when one displaces individualism with a re-theorised fragmented, decentred and non-coherent ‘self’ who, as such, cannot be ‘truly’ known through exposure of a private and independent interiority. But given that the ‘self’ is hegemonically understood and enacted in individualistic terms it is important to attend to ways in which the practice of intimacy is deployed to embrace and confirm this mode of existence and the means by which it does so. One such project by which power is exercised in this ‘intimate’ production of truth and its illumination of subjects, and one that acts as the relay for self-mutual disclosure and surveillance, is the humanist ethic of ‘open and honest communication’ which, as Rose (1989) suggests, can be understood as the contemporary, therapeutic form of the confessional.
7.7 **Constitutions of communication**

In the following extracts the practice of a (dis)closing intimacy is expressed as the enactment and result of open, honest and unreserved communication.

_Ethan [H/NM2]:_ Intimacy is that being, communicating very closely and openly. So not having, it’s kind of like not having barriers in your communication. So it’s um, being able to say whatever there is to say. Talk about anything however kind of personal it is. Um, so each person knows exactly where the other person is and what they’re doing and what’s going on for them so there’s never any kind of wonder. Never wondering about what’s going on for the other person. Always knowing and no surprises. And that’s kind of intimacy for me.

_Clare [H/NM2]:_ Um, intimacy is where you are communicating with no concerns or barriers or defences.

_Max [H/NM2]:_ Um, intimacy to me is (.) probably best characterised by a totally open and totally honest communication. / MF: mm mm / Um, not being afraid to say something, not holding something back because you’ve been concerned about how the person might react to it. Um, you know, I guess ultimately being so open and honest that you are at one with that person.

Subtextual to this total and open communication or mode of speech that produces the experience of ‘intimacy’, as articulated in these extracts, there is again the presumption of a subject who harbours a truth that can be relayed via a form of honest telling that is ideally not restricted if the full truth is to be made known. It is as if one is truly authentic and free if able to bravely communicate (and be monitored) in this way (see Masters _et al_, 1982). In these quotes language itself is implicitly constructed as ideally transparent (at least potentially) and as a mere conduit of information about selves and detail rather than as a field of power-knowledge, yet the power effects of the transmission of knowledge via an unrestricted communication are implicit in the above extracts. With reference to Ethan’s quote, it’s as if the knowledge generated by open and honest communication allows for a freedom of ‘always knowing and no surprises’; that is, a freedom and security that, as in Elizabeth’s extract above, comes with knowing ‘exactly’ where the other is in thought and deed, of there being no need to wonder, no secrets, and no element of surprise. The other, and the relationship of one to another, are constituted in and by an expected regularity and predictability that aims at the reduction of diverse positions of the self and other(s) - a reduction made particularly explicit in Max’s idealised ‘oneness’. As such, disciplinary
regulation and control are as acute in this fidelity of an open and honest communication as a regulative and subjectifying technology as they are in a fidelity of sexual monogamy or of disclosing secrets for example. Thus the idea that an open, honest and ‘no barriers’ communication between in(ti)mates represents an enlightened approach to, and practice of, couple relationships as endorsed by psychology (e.g. Rogers, 1973; Masters et al, 1982; Emmers-Somer, 2004) can alternatively be seen as an extension of discipline as confession and self-mutual surveillance are enacted and legitimised in the name of ‘good’ communication that in being construed as merely the effective and harmonious transmission of information (e.g. Emmers-Somer, 2004) occludes its regulative effects.

This notion of communication as ‘open’ conversation or dialogue has from a critical and post-structuralist perspective been viewed as a conduit for the production of selves and social reality in progress (Shotter, 1993a, 1993b; Montgomery and Baxter, 1998; Grant, 2003). As Shotter (1993b) highlights in an example of the productivity of what he refers to as ‘conversational realities’, the intimate ‘I love you’ statement can function to (re)constitute the relation of those in dialogue with each other. This kind of statement, one that on the surface expresses inner feelings and thought, works to bind both speaker and addressee to particular rights and duties, expectations and ways of Being as a culturally familiar and sanctioned ‘reality’ is established and reconfirmed (and not merely transmitted) in its communication. Communicative or conversational activity of the ‘open and honest’ kind - one that as Shotter suggests is constitutive of social, relational and subjective ‘realities’ - is therefore also a disciplinary procedure in that it warrants confession, makes known every detail of another, functions as the relay for surveillance and transmits power as it subjectifies people and produces a set of ‘realities’.

Put another way, in the act of what is construed as an open and free flowing communication, words are produced that do more than merely reflect an inner authenticity. Such a production enjoins the subject and the couple to the pre-established meanings of the words spoken and to the obligations and the constitutive power they carry (Foucault, 1972, 1978a). In these extracts language is constituted as communication and this communication is in turn construed as ideally and possibly totally honest – a no barriers communication (particularly idealised in non-monogamous relationships because sex is not the primary transmission of truth) that works not to clarify truth so much as produce it. And the ‘truth’
that intimacy supposedly generates I have interpreted as binding the couple to a certain mode of existence, one that (like the other couple qualities explored) renders the coupled-subject and couple relationships as immobile, regular, calculable and governable in a warranted ‘authenticity’ that produces clear relations of productive power and regulative control. In the following section of this chapter I elaborate further the power of into-me-see as it subjectifies the emotionalised subject in an ethical relation to him/herself and urges one to become an emotional Being willing to define, examine, actualise and regulate oneself according to culturally specific ethical codes and procedures.

7.8 The regulative ethic of emotional intimacy

Earlier in the chapter (section 7.3) it was pointed out that ‘sex’ can be theoretically and culturally understood as that which differentiates a ‘lover intimacy’ from a generalised intimacy had with family and friends. In an extract from Ricky, for example (page 227), giving himself sexually is talked about as the ‘most profound type of intimacy’ in that it provides a platform for his exposure of a seemingly ‘raw’, unrestrained authenticity. In relation to this association of sex and the truth of selves, or sex as a regime of truth, Foucault (1978a) offers a history of a ‘sexuality’ that he argues functions as a specific field or relay of truth, one that since the nineteenth century produced a new distribution of knowledge, pleasures and powers. According to Foucault’s genealogy, in Victorian society where sex and sexuality were not repressed but were rather the activations of an entire machinery for producing the ‘truth’ of selves, we demanded that sex tell us its truth and that it tell us our truth by delivering up parts of ourselves (via confessions of the flesh) that have escaped us and of which we saw (and see) see ourselves as being consciously ignorant.

Led by a ‘formidable petition to know’ or ‘Will to Truth’, Foucault argues that during the nineteenth century there was a marked inclination to direct the question of who and what we are to sex and the morality surrounding it (ibid.: 78) – an asking that significantly upheld and reconfirmed a system of (conjugal and familial) alliances. In a legitimated knowledge of sex we aimed, Foucault argues, to discover a legitimate knowledge of ourselves as subjects in our pleasures, fears, perversions, desires, thoughts, norms, and relationships, for example - while, of course, being constituted in and by the discourse of sex (and its matrix of power) that was everywhere in Victorian society ignited and not silenced, as generally believed. Thus Foucault
situates sex/sexuality, at that time, as a particularly dense transfer point for relations of power and knowledge. Pursuing Foucault’s analysis of sex and sexuality as a productive regime and power-knowledge of ‘truth’, I want to suggest that the subjectifying power that produces and infuses sex(uality) is a power that has come to warrant ethical adjustments of an emotional subjectivity as a further regime of truth. In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries the question of who and what we are can be seen as being directed ever more acutely to an emotional truth about ourselves as ethical obligations are intensified; an asking that similarly serves to uphold the system of socio-politically organised alliances. In this regime of emotional truth the purities and perversions of sex are not the primary site for a legitimate knowledge of ourselves but focus extends to the purity and imperfections of emotions and ‘emotional liberation’ emerges as the imperative of the day. In other words, to the extent that ‘perverse’ sex and/or extra-couple sex are made (more) acceptable the disciplinary focus can be seen as shifting from ‘sex’ to ‘emotional connection’.  

Concurrent to constructions of intimacy that conflate sex, love and intimacy and that privileges sex as being central to a profound couple-intimacy (or love), there is also the (non-monogamous and masculinist) construction of intimacy wherein sex and intimacy/love are conceptually separated (see Hollway’s, [1989] interpretation of the ‘permissive discourse’ as referred to above). In this construction it is emotion and not sex that is central to the ‘real’ intimate experience and, therefore, the ‘truth’ of oneself and one’s partner.

Elizabeth [L/M]: But I don’t think intimacy necessarily means sex. Um, I think perhaps a lot of people use sex as a form of being intimate, but it’s not.

Clare [H/NM2]: I consider intimacy to be completely independent of sex.

Peter [G/NM2]: Um, I think there’s levels of intimacy, ar, the physical and emotional. And um, I think you can look at them separately um, sometimes. Um, but intimacy on a sort of general level, um, is like showing a little bit of your real self to somebody, / MF: mm / whether that be, you know, physical or emotional.

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4 This is not to suggest that regulation around sexual ‘truth’ and moral prohibition has been entirely replaced by an ethical and emotional ‘truth’ of people. There are, for example, continuing diatribes regarding family values in Australia, the U.S. and U.K. with the championing of marriage and the call for educating children about marriage in the U.K., the banning of gay marriage in the U.S. and Australia, the continued vilification of single mothers and non-heterosexual nuclear families, the surfacing of legislation that restricts IVF technology to married couples and the mega-rise of Christian fundamentalism in the West and the associated backlash against feminism.
MF: Is sex secondary then in your understanding of intimacy?

Tyler [H/NM2/ND]: Yeah [...] I think that sexual intimacy is a um, like instant coffee. It’s a crash course. It generates a lot of assumptions or expectations or desires for true intimacy; / MF: mm / but it's kind of a pseudo intimacy. Um, if it’s followed through with the wider, truer, deeper intimacy of sharing secrets, of sharing emotions and learning and growing and taking risks together then yeah, it’s a nice starting point. It’s a good spark, but it’s not the coal. It’s a match but it’s not the log. Yeah. It’ll get you going.

For Peter a distinguishable emotional intimacy, like its sexual counterpart, is a vehicle for exposure of a ‘real self’, a kind of truth that Tyler can also be read as implying as he talks of a de-sexualized, ‘wider, truer, deeper intimacy’ as lighting the glow of authenticity and steering a couple towards an altogether truer Truth. In Tyler’s account in particular, it’s as if an emotional intimacy and capacity not tied to sex is the path to a higher consciousness and greater self-knowledge. It’s as if emotional purity is that which tells us our truths by delivering up aspects of ourselves (via confessions of self-disclosure) that have hitherto escaped us. These extracts can be viewed as reflecting a masculinised construction of intimacy that separates sex and love (wherein women are positioned as romantic subjects who ‘naturally’ conflate the two and men are positioned as ‘naturally’ promiscuous subjects able to divorce the two; Hollway, 1989). In this privileging of an ‘emotional intimacy’ as a ‘truer’ form of intimacy there can be seen a (re)distribution of relations of power according to a ‘truth’ of selves and relationships that is determinable not so much by a truth of sex but a sharing of emotional realities. So power and knowledge extends from sexual interdiction, supervision and confession and is being aligned with an ethics of emotion in the practice of a ‘deeper’ intimacy that Cancian (1987) sees as reflecting the nineteenth century ‘feminisation of love’ (an ideology that identifies love and intimacy not with the sexual act alone but with ‘pure’ feelings, the domestic space and the woman’s role in it).

The above extracts also reflect the kind of ‘transformed’, ‘pure’ intimacy of ‘modernity’ that Giddens (1992) theorises in his therapeutic and liberationist account of coupledom – a form of intimacy that is ‘freed’ from sexual obligation and prohibition and is instead predicated on obligations concerning the emotional truth of self, identity, and relationships. “Intimacy”,
argues Giddens (1992: 130), “is above all else a matter of emotional communication with others and with the self in a context of interpersonal equality.” Echoing humanist ideations of liberated marriage as articulated in the 1970s (see chapters two, five and six), what Giddens (cf. Plummer, 1995) is subscribing to is the increasing emotionalisation of intimacy, postulating an ethical, self-fashioned (and self-fashioning) emotional intimacy as the basis of modern identity and relationships. Now, while an emotional intimacy and verbosity is constructed and privileged as being the ‘modern’ transfer point for a ‘wider, truer, deeper’ knowledge of self and other, it is, I would argue, limiting to equate such an emphasis on emotional truth-telling with a ‘new freedom’ of self and couples and more insightful to analyse this apparent ‘transformation of intimacy’ as rather a ‘new’ regulatory and productive transfer point for a constitutive power of emotional adjustments and ethical self-maneuverings.

To recap briefly the account of Foucault’s genealogy of the ethical subject as offered in chapter four, Foucault (1985) extends his theory of disciplinary power from an economy of visibility-observation-confession to include the kinds of aesthetic self-affirmations and self-technologies that are required of the individual in an endeavour to form oneself as an ethical subject.

“Here the emphasis is on the form of relations with the self, on the methods and techniques by which he works them out, on the exercises by which he makes of himself an object to be known, and on the practices that enable him to transform his whole mode of being.”

(Foucault, 1985: 30).

In his later work subjectivity is theorised as emerging from an aesthetics of ‘self-mastery’ that is constructed as ‘freedom’ and associated with ‘truth’ (Foucault, 1985: 91). Here Foucault gives emphasis to the power of subjectification in terms of the relation one has to oneself – a form of discipline that is not to be taken as being separate to the disciplines of pantopticism and confession. In this aesthetic subjectification of self-to-self, emotions can be viewed as a primary basis for defining and regulating oneself according to ethical codes and procedures, as the basis on which one monitors, tests, and actualises oneself in a bid for personal freedom. As Foucault (1985) remarks, the ‘self-referential authority’ of ethical practice took on therapeutic form particularly during the twentieth century. This is clearly evident in
humanist appraisals of the liberated and fulfilling relationships of modernity where a revitalising ethics of emotional completeness is advanced as therapeutically transformative (e.g. Rogers, 1973; Branden, 1981; Giddens, 1992; Weeks, 2000; Weeks *et al.*, 2001). And it is also evident in Fromm’s (1957) guide to the ‘art of loving’ where the five ‘disciplines’ involved in the art or aesthetics of loving that are to be practiced by oneself are listed as self-discipline, concentration, patience, supreme concern or effort, and rational thinking.

In the following extract, Max describes a process of subjective and masterful fine tuning and re-articulates Fromm’s art of loving as a means of developing emotional virtuosity and a more ‘open’ kind of love. The context of the quote is that Max is talking of his exploration of a polyamorous (group marriage) love-style as a means of helping him with a better and more open kind of loving.

*Max [H/NM2]:* I mean the concept of love has been something that I've not been very good at previously. I do want to become more of an emotional person. / MF: mm mm / [...] And this is um, I guess part of what I'm exploring at the moment is to be more open and unconditional with my love [...] I'm perhaps, you know, looking more inwardly perhaps. I mean I've always been big on self-development and the more emotional aspects of intimacy [...] So I'm sort of I guess picking and choosing which parts of my life I want to process at an emotional level and which parts I want to process at an intellectual level. So um, you know, I guess I'm making a constant assessment of um, you know, which bit I'll process intellectually and which bit I'll process emotionally. I want to consciously, I guess, intercept all of those thought processes and point them in the right direction that I want to point them in and process them as I see, you know, appropriately. And what is appropriate I'm sure will evolve over time and will probably change over time. But at the moment I've got a sort of certain idea of which bits I want to go where and I'm trying to push them through the right gate I guess.

In aiming to be better at love, develop emotionally and improve his relationships, Max talks of reflexively and ethically engaging in a conscious, therapeutic, and disciplined process of transformative, emotional self-development. While on the one hand intimacy as a compulsion to self-disclose and tell all produces couples and coupled subjects as calculable, stable, constant and predictable and therein as ‘authentic’, there is, as Max illustrates, another emphasis on personal development and thereby of a mutable, changing ‘self’ as a mark of ‘authenticity’. Thus inasmuch as intimacy/love can be construed and practiced as either the confirmation or as the development of ‘self’, the ‘authentic’ subject being produced by either version can be constructed differently (cf. Stenner and Watts, 1998; Stenner, 1999). As with
Barry (page 242), the pleasure here is about the challenge of self-development rather than a straightforward self-disclosure, although Max is not reverting to a prior authenticity but speaks of creating it anew. Aiming at self-development through a responsible and masterful processing of thought and emotional response, the subject does not simply emerge as a more complete version of himself in this subjectifying process of inward looking self-examination and ‘constant assessment’ but is re-constituted and re-regulated according to what it means to be a free-flowing emotional individual and the forms of ‘authenticity’ and self-communication (i.e. the ‘technologies of self’, Foucault, 1988) this requires. This agentic information processor of cognitive psychology that Max figures himself as, is constituted by emotional and rational thought, is figured as able to consciously and objectively process self-knowledges, reflect on them, assess them, pick from them, intercept and arrange them at will in a disciplined and enterprising processing of feelings, desire and response that elsewhere in his interview Max talks about as liberating him from the constraints of a monogamous and conditional emotionality. As Foucault remarks:

“The task of testing oneself, examining oneself, monitoring oneself in a series of clearly defined exercises, makes the question of truth – the truth concerning what one is, what one does, and what one is capable of doing – central to the formation of the ethical subject.”

(Foucault, 1986: 68).

As an ethical subject (or ‘new-age’ man in touch with his emotions) Max gives an account of re-forming himself according to a chosen ‘truth’ of uninhibited emotion and unconditional love which are by no means uninhibited or unconditional in requiring the very explicit conditions of intense self-examination, scrutiny and self-monitoring if a ‘pure’ form of emotional intimacy is to be mastered. In attempting to overcome himself as a one-time monogamous individual, in wanting to reconstitute himself in a freer, ethical (non-moralised) truth of ‘open’ love and ‘unconditional’ emotions to facilitate his chosen relational style, Max aims at a self-rejuvenation that is ‘appropriate’ to his non-monogamous endeavours as he picks, chooses and redirects aspects of himself through the ‘right gate’. In so doing, this text can be read as an example of the consuming, self-facilitating and self-managing entrepreneur of neo-liberalism who can freely ‘pick and choose’ identity and a life course and who is able to act independently by virtue of a freedom-from-contract (chapter five) as if unconditional love is not itself a form of (Judeo-Christian) social contract and an historically instituted
form of ‘freedom’. But in order to push himself through the ‘right’ gate and enter into ‘new’ territory there is first a particular relation of self-to-self that is to be shaped according to an ethics of self-problematisation and self-mastery that the vision of unconditional emotional maturity installs. Like the constraints of morality and conditional love this self-mastery is assumed to overcome, this ‘freedom’ of an unconditional intimacy and love-style involves a ‘certain idea’ of which bits of self go where and so is also constrained by what the vision sets up as ‘appropriate’.

In other words, while no longer obedient to the ‘traditional’ moral code and conditionality of monogamy, Max is nonetheless obedient to a code of conduct and self-truth that is no less powerful or regulative in the ethics of freedom and loving he is choosing to live and love by. As a ‘free’ individual in his adaptive and actualising self-knowledge, Max in this account is in effect governed by an ethic of self-development and choice as he works his way towards the ‘freedom’ of unconditional love and a ‘true’ intimacy. The care-of-self, however, enacted in this striving for emotional virtuosity and liberty is no open-ended exploration of self-creation. Rather in the alleged emotional freedom of a ‘pure’ and ‘unconditional’ couple relationship (non-monogamous or otherwise) the same predictable and regulatory path toward the certainty, security and transparency of self-other awareness is being trod regardless of the basis (or vision) of that awareness – conventional morality and a freedom-of-contract or a self-governed ethics in a freedom-from-contract.

In this interpretation of Max’s extract I have aimed to demonstrate something of the regulative power of an ethics of freedom manifesting as ‘emotional intimacy’; an ethical style of intimacy that in(ti)mates can construct as enabling a more profound relation to personal and relational truth than its sexual (moral) counterpart. As a regime of truth consolidated during the late twentieth century and early twentieth-first centuries particularly in the discourse of sexual liberation, an emotionalised couple intimacy moves the question of our ‘truth’ from an authenticity (and exclusivity) of sex to an authenticity of emotions and feelings that is no less regulative in the kinds of self-examinations and ethical disciplines it warrants in the name of change and self-development. Emotional intimacy, then, as an authoritative discourse and mode of conduct that is pertinent to but by no means exclusive to non-monogamous practice, is an exercise of power operating as an ethical self-development and self-governance that in its regulation of internal feelings as opposed to
overt behaviour can be seen as intensifying rather than relaxing regulation, as Giddens, 1992, for example, sees it. My reading of constructions of emotional intimacy in the above extracts underscores the central argument of this chapter – that couple-intimacy (whether configured and conducted sexually or emotionally, or as both) is no mere key to a ‘fullness’ of ourselves and of life but is a potent power-knowledge and relay point for various forms of individualising subjugations that are mobilised in the deployment of into-me-see as a relational tool and/or means of self-development.

7.9 Conclusion

This chapter has offered a re-conceptualisation of couple-intimacy as involving an array of multiple, often conflicting, practices and regimes of truth that demarcate the couple relationship, regulate its configurations, produce specific modes of speech and make possible the lived subjectivity of the ‘authentic’ subject. Accordingly, what intimacy ‘is’ cannot be measured, encapsulated, or conceptualised as simply a form of self-relational behaviour, sensory perception or as a ‘natural’ social action that somehow precedes us as an evolutionary mechanism for the guaranteeing of human sociality or survival. I have argued that intimacy, as we know and practice it, is above all symptomatic of self-contained individualism and is the effect of the socio-historic landscaping of ‘privacy’, ‘authenticity’ and the ‘good life’. This relationship imperative and its psychologised characteristics and functions are not reducible to a universal ‘essence’ of human nature and desire but are to do with what we see ourselves as being and needing as responsibilised subjects of self-knowledge and possessors of truth. Intimacy is not the straightforward manifestation of love, sex, or emotion (or a combination of these), nor the simple effect of pairing-up and being ‘close’ but is inextricably tied to an historically specific concern for everything ‘authentic’ which has, since the late eighteenth century, always been sought and found in the inner chambers of structure and substance (Derrida, 1976; Deleuze and Guattari, 1977; Foucault, 1978a; Butler, 1990). I have interpreted into-me-see is a prime technology for accessing this inner authenticity, for speaking it into being, and for validating it in comparison with others – as a means of coming into the possession of one kind of ‘truth’ about ourselves and our relationships while letting go of possible others as we rescue a certain sensation of Being in being fulfilled and happy in(ti)mates.
In particular, I have attended to the collectivity of constructions of intimacy as a systematic power-knowledge by which we gain a purchase on ourselves and an-other, arguing that in making such purchases via the technology of into-me-see we are buying into an ‘authenticity’ of self and inter-subjectivity that is no reflection of the ‘truth’ of selves and couples but the precise means for constituting these subjectivities as their ‘truths’ are accessed, spoken, monitored and confirmed. Thus the ‘authenticities’ believed to be revealed and made known through the deployment of intimacy brings the ‘intimate’ subject and couple into a particular field of visibility and relation to power that authorises specific modes of speech and forms of truth-telling and which, like the other privileged couple ‘qualities’ under review, work to effectively normalise and discipline.

In these terms, the discursive practice of intimacy can be seen to warrant and legitimise as pleasurable and healthy a voyeuristic form of self-mutual surveillance – pleasurable because it is conceived as a looking into a private truth which can ostensibly be exposed and observed, and healthy because it seemingly delivers up a complete and mature knowledge of ourselves. But unlike the pathologised voyeurism of watching another’s sexual actions or organs, the authorised voyeurism of intimacy positions the subject not only as spectator. This watching (of oneself and one’s partner) demands action and response while it also observes and monitors. As suggested above, the action and response demanded of us as we watch ourselves and are watched through the lens of intimacy is that we come into a particular relation to ourselves and dependency on a significant other – a relation in which we are made visible and thus (potentially) continually observable if we are and our relationships are to be truly known and real. While the peeping of a pathologised voyeurism is said to be a form of dysfunctional sexual arousal (Davison and Neale, 1996), observance in the allegedly ‘healthy’ voyeurism of intimacy is construed as the means of a functional and normalising arousal of self-actualisation. And as we are actualised and normalised in being so watched, and by internalising this observance, we are brought into a relation with a political power that fosters the normalising visibilities of self-actualisation and authenticity – of self and relationship ‘realness’ – as a mode of governance, one that we in turn foster by our self-enacted illuminations of actuality.

While the analysis offered in chapter five regarding the common deployment of the metaphors of house and home in participant’s accounts of their relationships showed how this
constitutes coupledom as a comfortable and safe domestic/emotional space protected from a vilified ‘outside’, in this chapter I have shown how through a deployment of couple-intimacy the disciplinary and normalising gaze is brought inside the home so that the seeming privacy behind the walls of ‘home’ is not a space of ‘freedom’ from discipline or external socio-political influence. As Rose (1989) argues, while our “intimate lives, our feelings, desires and aspirations, seem quintessentially personal” and that “[t]here is, no doubt, much comfort to be afforded by such a belief”, it is nevertheless “profoundly misleading” (ibid.: 1).

“Our personalities, subjectivities, and ‘relationships’ are not private matters...On the contrary, they are intensively governed. Perhaps they have always been...Conduct, speech and emotion have been examined and evaluated in terms of the inner states that they manifest, and attempts have been made to alter the visible person by acting upon this visible inner world. Thoughts, feelings and actions may appear as the very fabric and constitution of the intimate self [and intimate couple relationships], but they are socially organised and managed in minute particulars.”

(Rose, 1989: 1)

That the politically activated and psychologically installed normalising gaze of heteropatriarchy constitutes the couple-home as a ‘safe haven’ (Bowlby, 1969) from the social realm, from ‘outside’ dangers and as a site of alleged freedom and truth, while it seeks to regulate who can be together in that home and dictate a hegemonic experience of it in a limitation of choice and freedom while configuring the home as a ‘haven’, whether constituted hetero-normatively or not, in the ‘free’ and ‘private’ couple relationships as formulated by participants the very ‘openness’ of intimacy within that ‘private’ space reproduces the panopticon. In this re-production of panoptic power and the containments, visibilities and authenticities it produces and monitors, the couple relationship and ourselves in them, as Rose argues above, is no private matter in either its (or our) conventional or ‘transformed’ figurations but publicly organised, managed and governed in ever more acute and minute ways.
What is and what can be played?

“We must make the intelligible appear against a background of emptiness and deny its necessity. We must think that what exists is far from filling all possible spaces. To make a truly unavoidable challenge of the question: What can be played?”

Michel Foucault (1981b: 139-140)

“There are a thousand paths that have never yet been trodden, a thousand forms of health and hidden islands of life. Man ands man’s earth are still unexhausted and undiscovered.”

Friedrich Nietzsche (1883: 102)

“Why this system and this form? A thousand others, which we find in other times and other places are possible.”

Gilles Deleuze (1953: 47)

8.1 Intentions

With these provisional concluding comments I draw together aspects of what has hitherto been outlined and argued in relation to the couple matrix as a productive and regulative system of power-knowledge. Sections 8.2 and 8.3 provide an overview of the story I have told about the fictioning of couple-substance, structure and subjectivities and its predication on a logocentric binary logic and system of thought that underwrites the fiction of not only coupledom but of all given ‘realities’ (Foucault, 1970; Derrida, 1976; Deleuze and Guattari, 1977, 1980). Indeed one principle line of argument throughout this thesis has been that the power-knowledge and rhetoric of contemporary Western coupledom contain the legacy of, and are generated within, this socio-historic and discursive fashioning of thought and what it serves to reify, totalise, fix, and centralise in its imposition of a polarised ‘inner-outer’ structure which is but a mirage of language (Derrida, 1976) that ‘functions in truth’ (Foucault, 1977c). In accordance with the ontological and discursive stratification of unequally valued experiences and spaces, the multiple and often conflicting intelligibilities of
coupledom can be seen to have been significantly enabled, psychologised and authorised and its series of centralising power relations activated in specific ways. In short, the socio-historic, political and discursive matrix of coupledom, particularly as it has emerged and developed from the late seventeenth century onwards, has been highlighted as an assemblage of supposedly distinct (inner) presences and (outer) absences wherein meaning is produced but always deferred and thus never settled or final and the seemingly transcendental ‘truths’ of coupledom constructed.

The second aspect to this chapter, as indicated in its title, concerns a possible way of resisting the systematised and hegemonic couple domain. This is predominately framed along the lines of a ‘Deleuzian pluralism’ (Potts, 2001) and its emphasis on de-territorialised flows and (differently) productive flights of resistance that can potentially bypass some of the problematic reproductions and duplications of ‘truth’ in current moves of resistance and relationship ‘freedoms’ as I see them being played. In calling for a re-thinking of couple-practice and its current (re)productivities I reaffirm that I am not arguing for the redundancy of pairing as a pleasurable and beneficial social arrangement or as a ‘useful’ means of inter-personal connection in either its conventional or ‘alternative’ configurations as these have been outlined. I do not frame a utopian view of either freedom or resistance as in a subversion of the status quo that can somehow occur outside of the discourses and power relations that set this up and that make various forms of resistance available. However as already apparent, I do question those pre-determined socio-political and discursive conditions that underwrite what can be talked about and thereby experienced as ‘real’, as ‘freedom’ or as ‘pleasurable’ and ‘beneficial’ as people inhabit the couple domain and live out its various subjectifications. My intention has always been to upset those dominant theorisations, constructions and experiences of coupledom that make it intelligible as a fundamental and quasi-inevitable aspect of a ‘securitised’ and ‘fulfilling’ mode of human existence which delimits other possibilities and avoids the question ‘what else can be played?’ (Foucault, 1981b).

In posing this question I am neither proposing a ‘truer’ style of pairing nor denouncing that which is currently being played in either traditional or non-conventional partnerships but this does not prohibit asking about the ‘what else’ – an asking that should not infer that I am overlooking or discrediting ways in which people (feminists, non-monogamists, and same-
sex couples, for example) are doing the best they can to work with the system of coupledom while often expressing, and thus giving form to, its limitations and confinements be it sexual monogamy, gender inequality or a heterosexist modelling. As apparent from the preceding discussions and analyses, mine is primarily a denial of the necessity of a hegemonic ‘doing’ of coupledom as an alleged access to a ‘healthy’, ‘contained’ and ‘authentic’ identity and mode of relating – all three of which are, in existential terms, thought to represent irrefutable and truthful manifestations of a genuine humanity.

My challenge to the couple relationship springs from deconstructing the practice as a politicised, psychologised and socio-historically specific power-knowledge that functions to move people - and which we deploy for the moving of ourselves - towards a seemingly transcendental and unquestioned ‘truth’ that is itself conditional on the development of capitalism and a liberalist rationality and is thus of acute political and economic significance. In and by this normalising relation to ‘truth’, its taken for granted necessity and value and its concomitant construal of ‘falsity’, what we are more precisely being moved towards, or rather being made up through, is that conglomerate of already coded power relations that bring into view and privilege singular forms of ‘being ourselves’ and of ‘being connected’. Or, put another way, that cause us to possess one kind of truth and so responsibly live as (and in) one kind of rationalised and essentialised substance and structure while letting go of, and being denied, other possibilities and productivities (Nietzsche, 1887a; Foucault, 1972; Deleuze and Guattari, 1977, 1980). In critiquing what this incisive relation to a pre-scribed truth requires of couples and the coupled-subject, other forms of relations and other productivities may potentially come into view once detached from a truth imperative and the various totalities, powers and disciplinary technologies this serves to establishes. So in thinking about what else can be played, in the spirit of Nietzsche, and of Heidegger, Foucault and Deleuze after him, I am envisaging the possibility of other forms of health and life that remain unexhausted and undiscovered as we, for one thing, go about being coupled in currently pre-determined and determining ways. These ways, as they have been interpreted and critiqued in preceding chapters, are what I provide a synthesis of in the next two sections.
8.2 A tam(ed)ing interiority

Drawing largely on Foucauldian theory and its post-structuralist, anti-humanist line of critique, the principle basis for the appraisal offered in this thesis was a reconceptualisation of coupledom as a constitutive, regimented and regimenting power-knowledge; that is, as a site or process for a particular formation of ourselves and our intimate relationships with partners. In viewing the couple relationship as a primary site or process for a productive and regulatory formation of experience and truth, a hegemonic doing of coupledom was conceived as a “game through which one sees certain forms of subjectivity, certain object domains, [and] certain types of knowledge come into being” (Foucault, 1973b: 4). In short, my de-naturalisation of coupledom as a particular ordering (regime or game) of truth has been predicated on a post-structuralist troubling of the relationship between ‘knowledge’ and the ‘truth’ of what is known where the assumed unity of the two is alternatively understood as an illusory or synthetic connection and therefore a function of a power - not merely a sovereign power but also one that energises, structures and codes matter in particular ways, with specific effects, and which involves all things and all people (Foucault, 1977a, 1977e, 1978a; Deleuze and Guattari, 1977). This is a power that both produces and regulates the ‘reality’ of subjects and objects, that assembles the rules by which the ‘true’ and the ‘false’, the ‘good’ and the ‘bad’, the ‘healthy’ and ‘unhealthy’ are separated and that attaches a particular privilege to that which is deemed to be true, good and healthy.

Thus from a post-structuralist perspective, and as detailed in chapter three, there is no natural tie between a ‘truth’ of human nature and the knowledge or language which is taken to represent it. So the acquisition of ‘objective’ knowledge is not seen to guarantee an ability to truly know things as an empiricist philosophy or science would have it (e.g. Hammersley, 1995; Fletcher, 2002). Rather the social scientific acquisition of a ‘knowledge’ and ‘truth’ of the couple relationship, particularly from the latter twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, can moreover be seen to serve the interests of a specific political and economic rationality and as authorising a series of inter-personal ‘laws’ that function as highly politicised technologies for a self and mutual governance in the name of self-actualisation, fulfilment and freedom. That is to say, and drawing on Foucault’s (1978b) theory of governmentality as outlined in chapter one, the psychosocial sculptings and valorisations of a ‘well-functioning’ couple relationship during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries can be seen as reflecting a
(neo)liberal ethos of government such that questions of and prescriptions for personal/relational ‘freedom’, ‘health’, ‘satisfaction’, ‘stability’ and ‘realness’ are implicated in, and propel, a strategic regulation of selves and intimate relations.

So on the basis of Foucault’s theories of discourse, power, subjectivity and governmentality, I have argued that the ‘knowledge’ of coupledom and the alleged ‘truth’ of this knowledge do not originate in or reflect the ‘instinctive’ and ‘natural’ desires of humanity but are the contingent products of socio-historic, political, architectural and discursive invention (Nietzsche, 1887a; Foucault, 1972, 1977a, 1978a; Deleuze and Guattari, 1977; Rose, 1989, 1999). My point of departure was not to begin from the usual premise that the practices and values of coupledom are the inevitable effect of human capabilities, freedoms, affections, needs and desires – the premise underlying traditional social-scientific treatment of the subject matter as discussed in chapter two. Rather, I have argued and aimed to illustrate throughout that hegemonic couple practices such as romantic love, dyadic exclusivity, commitment, trust and intimacy, and couple-values such as containment, certainty, security, authenticity and permanence are the specific effects of historically shifting relations of power and discursive, politicised formulations of knowledge and experience. In other words, the dominant knowings, doings and truth claims of the couple experience as they recur in psychosocial theory and popular discourse have been both made possible and sculptured by virtue of sedimentary but mutating historical, political, socio-economic and discursive conditions – all operating as manifold powers and forces of emergence upon which the couple matrix (and the wider system of familial alliance more generally) takes its intelligible form and privileged status. As I have stated, one pervasive discursive condition (or relation of power) for the current ‘realities’ of coupledom is the generative binary principle of thought and classification and it is this that I here go on to discuss in further detail as a preparation for a re-thinking of practice and resistance that follows.

In chapter five’s analysis of a contained and containing dyadic substance and structure, reference was made to a Derridian (1976) and Deleuzian (1977) deconstruction of the pervasive binary machine seen as an historic (metaphysical) principle and discursive mechanism for the shaping of all Western thought and modes of discourse. Picking up on Nietzsche’s (1872, 1887a) critical analyses of the dichotomous formula of thought, these theorists (together with Foucault, 1972, and more recently Butler, 1990) refer the conceptualisation of
knowledge and the discursive enablement of various powers to a productive series of hierarchically defined oppositions such as truth-fiction, good-evil, mind-matter, inside-outside, wholeness-lack, man-woman and straight-gay. These theorists regard such a hierarchy of dualisms as being implicit in language, texts and ‘realities’ of all kinds. To briefly recapitulate, this pervasive binary principle and its segmenting, reifying and exclusionary logic of either/or underwrites the discursive organisation of utterances, knowledges, people, psychologies and actions as well as the reigning socio-political and economic order. It draws up lines of separation and division, of inclusion and exclusion, and arranges a series of partitions and circumscribed spaces across a previously uncoded field of energy or nebulae where outlines can be conceived as being blurred and untamed (Nietzsche, 1887a; Deleuze and Guattari, 1977). Operating over and above this plane of uncoded energy or untamed power as a means of making sense of it through the categorisation and division of its ‘elements’, a binary approach to thinking causes subjects and objects to emerge as coherent, unified totalities in accordance with what they are not thought to be. That is, elements and centres come-into-being against that which is set up in opposition to them (Derrida, 1976).

As such these territorialised and oppositional totalities (e.g. good-evil, reality-appearance, heterosexual-homosexual, monogamous-non monogamous) are always and already fictions in that they are reified, totalised and qualified by virtue of a binary logic that does not simply reflect knowledge and experience so much as carve up and polarise intelligibility in specific ways and therefore produce it. But not only are these totalised ‘realities’ produced and made intelligible in and by the operation of this discursive binary machine, they are also ascribed hierarchical value as one segment or term of a dualism gains ascendency over its assumed opposite and is afforded a taken-for-granted, privileged value by virtue of the imposed opposition.

In the preceding discussions, ways in which we think about, value and do coupledom were seen as being no exception to this conceptual, defining logic but very much predicated on it. Drawing from a Nietzschean and post-structuralist critique of this foundational, value-ascribing system of thought I have argued that the synthetic totality of coupledom – a territorialised kingdom of assembled practices, pleasures and values – gains its ascendency and status in accordance with those spaces and values that are discursively set up in opposition to it and thus excluded and absented from the domain in question. That is to say, like the ordered and exclusory domains of sanity, morality, sexuality and personhood, for
example, the domain of coupledom can be seen to have emerged against what it is believed to not be with this having all sorts of implications for what it and its array of benefits allegedly are. The centralised ‘truth’ of coupledom only gains its meaning and the domain of coupledom its various ‘presences’ – those of security, love, intimacy and so on – by perpetually alluding to the ‘absences’ from which the domain and its truths distinguish themselves. In earlier discussions of social contract theory and of Bowlby’s theory of mother-child attachment and the psychologisation of bonds of love and adult attachment that stemmed from this, the point was made that the very concepts and qualifications of contracted relations of exchange, of a ‘healthy’, ‘loving’ bondedness, of ‘safe havens’ and ‘secure’ attachment – each significantly impacting on the developing discourses and structures of married/couple relationships - were themselves conditional on specific framings of a negatively charged opposition or ‘other’ state conceived as either the ‘primitive’ nature of humankind or as the ‘pathologies’ of separation, isolation and maladjustment. In that the second and devalued term of a polarity exists in order to substantiate and qualify the first – being ‘isolated’ making possible and qualifying the idea of being ‘connected’, for example - Derrida (1976) argues that both sides of a polarity secretly reside in each other such that neither exist in its supposed totalised meaning at all.

Echoing the binary premise of social contract and attachment theory is the similar reasoning of Erich Fromm, for example, in his assertion of a need/desire to love and pair-up as being predicated on a negatively charged prior state that one ‘overcomes’ in a mature loving and from which one is consequently saved.

“The deepest need of man is to overcome his separateness, to leave the prison his aloneness.”

(Fromm, 1957: 14)

In being prescribed its value on the basis of a dualistic hierarchy we are then enticed to identify with the positive term and its ascribed benefits and courageously jump from one territory (that of isolation and lack) to its differently valued other (a state of wholeness, certainty and freedom). “To be loved, and to love”, affirms Fromm, “needs courage, the courage to judge certain values as of ultimate concern – and to take the jump and stake everything on these values” (ibid.: 90). Behind this enticement for unilateral cross-territory travel into the couple domain that recurs again and again in the psychology of romantic love
and relationships and that is reiterated in popular discourse (crossing from autonomy to connection, from fear to safety or from superficiality to depth, for instance), what is clearly apparent is a binary principle as being the very basis for the assumed seductions, attractions and benefits of coupledom as a territorialised domain where we go to find the salvations of ‘good health’, ‘completeness’, ‘certainty’, ‘security’ and ‘freedom’ – staking everything on these values in pursuing a relation to a totalised ‘truth’ that is itself an effect of the same classificatory apparatus (Nietzsche, 1887a; Foucault, 1970; Derrida, 1976). That couple relationships in particular are typically privileged in both theoretical and everyday discourse as a “key functional element in both our personal happiness and social efficacy” (Rose, 1989: 249) is, I have argued, a consequence of the various maladjustments, delinquencies, dangers, disorders and frustrations that are seen to inhabit the negated ‘outside’ territories of separateness, isolation and singledom (see Reynolds and Wetherell, 2003) or even a coupledom that is not ‘properly’ contained (e.g. O’Neill and O’Neill, 1972; Mazur, 1973; Rogers, 1973; Weeks et al, 2001). That which has, and those who have, been made to lurk in the shadows of an ‘outside’ realm – there imprisoned by virtue of the ‘freedoms’ of coupledom and other forms of ‘togetherness’ – are what in turn affirms the centrality and functionality of coupledom and asserts why we would want to occupy this domain in ways that we do.

This discursive totalisation and juxtaposition of pre-supposed segments - this “pyramidal hierarchization” as Foucault refers to it (1977c: xiii) - can be seen as that which organises, qualifies, and legitimates those couple practices and values as explored in the preceding analyses. In the analyses of chapters four to seven and the discursive conditions and productions there highlighted, I made the point that stemming from the discursive operation of the ‘binary machine’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1977) are the polarised spaces of private-public, inside-outside, order-chaos, wholeness-lack, certainty-uncertainty, and depth-superficiality, among others. In the application of this series of laws over language, thought and action - a political strategy and process in which the ‘psy’ disciplines play a significant part in their ‘expert’ prescriptions for a ‘stable’, ‘fulfilling’ relationship - the couple domain and ourselves in it have come to be arranged in particular ways that do not simply reflect, or emerge from, what it is to be authentically human. In such an arrangement and ordering of Truth, “we learn a language and a technology, a way of selecting, mapping, and interpreting certain modes of interchange as representing psychic needs and fears” (Rose, 1989: 257). But
rather than being either the keys to or the consequence of be(com)ing fully human, the psychologised needs, fears, pleasures, securities and freedoms that are supposedly fulfilled, made complete or averted in a ‘proper’ doing of coupledom are fictions because of the ways in which previously abstract energies, forces and powers have been brought to life or left lifeless. And where specific elements of an immanent realm of possibility have over time been brought into, or more precisely fictioned into human consciousness, from the late seventeenth century in particular, they have been made intelligible by virtue of an operative binary framework, its separation of ‘true and ‘false’ and its privileging of the former.

In this process of realising (or not realising) elements in the chain of (un)foreseen possibility into being (or non-being), realising a full capacity to love, exclusively connect, commit, trust, and be intimate are the seductions which lure individuals to couple relationships because of what these seductions have been made to represent and reportedly make possible. And, despite the so-called transformations and modernisations these seductions have been systematically theorised as undergoing by liberal-humanist theorists in particular (e.g. O’Neill and O’Neill, 1972; Rogers, 1973; Giddens, 1992; Weeks et al, 2001; Weeks, 2004), what these qualities in either their ‘confined’ or ‘liberated’ states can be seen as being products of are the historic, socio-political and dualistically qualified imperatives of having to be always regular, predictable, certain, stable, secure, moderate and real in both substance (who and what we are) and structure (how we live and relate). These are the recurrent imperatives, accesses to truth, and gravitational powers that both generate and authorise the assumed benefits and pleasures of the various couple practices explored and it is on these grounds that the taken-for-granted qualities of coupledom have been brought into question as ‘worthwhile’, ‘necessary’ and as keys to ‘success’. It is on these grounds that coupledom as a mental/emotional impulse and vital commodity for the purchase of good health, well-being and a securitised freedom has been challenged as a harnessing of one kind of ‘truth’, and us in it, while delimiting other possibilities.

What the four analysis chapters of this thesis have highlighted such a truth as being manifest of and as representing, and what it has been seen to make most necessary with regards to a doing of coupledom and couple-identity, is a form of truth that is believed to be found in the ‘proper’ enactments and illuminations of containment as a holding within, and authenticity as a consistent realness. The values of regularity, predictability, certainty, stability, security,
moderation and realness, as explicated in the analyses of chapters four to seven, can be seen as being inextricably tied to these two overriding regulations and technologies of truth/power. Thus it can be proposed that in adopting a particular way of life and correspondence to ‘truth’ in being coupled, the life and relations being deployed require the constant servicing and guaranteeing of containment and authenticity in their various forms of pre-scripted play.

8.3 Coupled in containment and authenticity

As suggested throughout the analyses, one of the primary ontological ‘conditions of possibility’ (Foucault, 1972) for the current knowledge and practice of coupledom is the eighteenth and nineteenth century consolidation of the self-contained, truth harbouring, inward looking individual who enters into a contracted relation with society and thereby develops an individualising consciousness of power and freedom with an ability to responsibly disclose, vouch for, and compare oneself with an-other(s) as working to confirm this subjective and subjectifying state (Nietzsche, 1887a; Heidegger, 1962; Foucault, 1977a, 1978a). Emanating from this individualising and substance forming condition, the qualities of dyadic exclusivity, commitment, trust, intimacy, love and ‘meaningful’ sex are constructed and made crucial for the containments and authentifications of ‘inner depth’ and ‘realness’ both in terms of oneself and one’s relationship.

Closely aligned with the rise of the self-contained subject as an object of truth are, for example, the eighteenth and nineteenth century installments of individualised emotions, of a privatised and exclusive sense of home, and of an inter-subjective closeness – all significant spatialisations (both metaphoric and material) that serve to contain and thus guarantee the continuation of ‘inner’ substance, essence, and socio-political structure. As such it was argued that a knowing and a doing of coupledom are not separate from a ‘metaphysics of substance’ (Butler, 1990) as a contingent system of thought that warrants the housing and containment of reified ‘essences’ or ‘centres’, be they of objects or subjects. And this historico-discursive move towards the containment of essences (and excesses) as a mark of truth and field of governance can be seen as the condition for psychotherapeutic knowledges about normality and pathology, and about authenticity and inauthenticity, particularly with regard to the mother-child relationship and the alleged benefits of adult attachment,
bondedness and domestic safe havens which the mother-child template for relating largely
gave rise to. Predominately emerging from psychoanalytic, evolutionary, humanist and
political discourses, notions of ‘stability’, ‘security’, ‘adjustment’ and ‘realness’ in the
interpersonal domain became vital for the at(con)tainments of personal happiness, health
and worth (Rose, 1989). The point to be reiterated here is that the various essences and
truths that people talk about as being ‘held within’ and thereby made ‘secure’, ‘real’ and
‘certain’ in a healthy and satisfying relationship - be it the essence of oneself or one’s partner,
one’s resources or future, or one’s time, emotions, conduct or happiness – are not, I have
argued, the resulting benefits of coupledom itself. Rather they are the effects of the
normalising and regulatory (concomitant) processes of containment and authentification
according to which we are effectively governed and kept governable in being made regular,
predictable, certain, stable, secure, moderate and real. Both the productive agents of
authenticity and containment work in conjunction to keep the truth of subjective and
relational ‘essences’, of promises and futures, of emotion and conduct held within pre-
scribed, artificial spaces and normalising interiorities. They can be seen as the processes or
sealing agents in and by which the domain of coupledom is constituted, circumscribed and
regulated in ways that it is.

In chapter four’s etymological exploration of the semantic conditions of emergence for the
present discursive practice of coupledom (as a practice of normalising containment and
authenticity), analysis illustrated how the contemporary couple has erupted from a never still
series of defining etymological moves which are always and already tied to any number of
heterogeneous and politically vitalised sources be they “philosophical doctrines, versions of
justice, conceptions of power, notions of social and human reality, beliefs about the efficacy
or otherwise of different courses of action and no doubt much else besides” (Rose, 1999:
275). All activated by the polarity of inner-outer, some of the conceptual and semantic
conditions for the power-knowledge of coupledom were shown to be the Enlightenment
rationalities of marital connection, a controlling closeness, a disclosing into-me-see, honest
modes of speech, a policing trust, and a moderate pleasure, for example – all of which were
from this period made knowable and necessary as technologies for the certification and
guarantee of a permanent, unchanging and predictable truth about ourselves and our
coupled-lives. Hence the very purpose to the literature review of chapter two, the
etymological analysis of chapter four and the discursive analyses of chapters five to seven
was to unpack the notion coupledom as a naturally evolving, private and final product and bring it into view as a collectivity of diverse elements such as contingent linguistic formations and traces of meaning, socio-political, metaphoric and architectural forces, discursive convergences and psychologised capacities and potentials. And without looking for a hidden unity, this heterogeneous, conditional and productive collectivity can be seen to actively organise the couple domain and its inhabitants according to an elaborate arrangement of (inter)personal *containments of authenticity*. By this I mean a genuine, essentialised ‘realness’ that is to be bound and contained so that the fabricated threat of inauthenticity is warded off and the ‘realness within’ the substances and structures of subjectivity and the couple ‘home’ made permanent as if the essential truth of these existences is to be found only in their ongoing invariability.

As I have illustrated in an analysis of how it is currently theorised and spoken of by people in various kinds of romantic relationships, coupledom can therefore be critiqued as an arrangement that, for one thing, works to generate a normalising containment of authenticity wherein we are not protected from the vilified ‘outside’ world so much as produced and disciplined within the shelters of love and dyadic togetherness, as well as the totalised forms of health, actualisation, security and freedom thought to be discoverable in the sanctuary of coupledom. Thus the socio-historic and discursive arrangement of subjective and relational containments of authenticity – the effect of a contingent ontology and a binary mechanism of understanding that are never final and not transcendental givens – can, I suggest, be seen as a dominant complex of power for the energisation of those knowledges, practices and illuminative technologies of coupling that are typically deployed for bringing oneself and another into a coercive relation to ‘truth’ wherein we and our possibilities are simultaneously formed, enabled and constrained.

Specifically (but not finally) containment and authenticity and the relations of force and meaning the merging of these two centralising powers produce can be seen to function as panoptic disciplinary principles as described in Foucault’s (1977a) ‘economy of visibility’. In being held within the various containments of authenticity that are administered, and re-confirmed, by a system of pairing in the name of individual and collective well-being, couples and the coupled-subject are, in effect, constituted and regulated by panoptic-like powers that evince a truth to be known and a subjection to be maintained (Foucault, 1977a).
Like the panopticon, the couple domain in its formative intimacies, domesticities, fidelities, truth-tellings and moral-ethical actualisations is an elaborately illuminated field of (and for) surveillance wherein everything about ourselves is (‘ideally’) made visible and thus effectively normalised and neutralised by this intricate web of voyeuristic, (self)inspecting gazes.

Bentham, the utilitarian reformer and architect of the panopticon, was not concerned about whether his inmates were functioning as soldiers or machines so long as they were ‘happy ones’ (Foucault, 1977a), Similarly, as in(ti)mates kept in check by a psychology that persistently traces over, renews and validates already established lines of discipline and surveillance in its attempts to maximise the utility of the human subject “and produce its willing docility” (Venn, 1984: 127), we similarly seem to occlude the machinations of power and control brought about by the panoptic domain of coupledom so long as we are ‘happy’ with ourselves and another under the spotlight and incubation of a pre-scripted ‘truth’ and comforted by its containments and moderations. It is a happiness, security, stability and fulfilment as aspired to in a play of coupledom that produces the compliance of the willing subject in this domain and which contributes to the success of a normalising power.

So, then, as Fromm (1957: 90) admonishes the loving and loved subject to have the “courage to judge certain values of ultimate concern and to take the jump and stake everything on these” – a subjectifying judgment and staking that throughout this thesis I have aimed to highlight as being consistently perpetuated in psychosocial theory and couple-talk - we are far from demonstrating courage but rather manifest the very docility and compliance produced by normalising power. In marked contrast to Fromm’s notion of compliant courage, Foucault poses a very different admonishment and, consistent with Nietzsche’s (1883, 1887a; 1887b) ‘will to power’ as the ability to transcend every fixed form and hegemonic value judged to be of ‘ultimate concern’, addresses the courage of resistance.

“Instead of bending before the arbitrariness and violence of what has previously seemed to be self-evidently true, the human being can always summon the courage to resist and think differently.”

(Foucault, cited in Miller, 2000: 304)

It is a resistance of the proliferous precepts, conditions and ‘self-evident’ truth-claims inherent in the power-knowledge of the couple matrix by way of a different style of thinking and political imagination that do not simply rest on a notion of resistance as “merely the
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obverse of a one-dimensional notion of power as domination” (Rose, 1999: 279; cf. Foucault, 1977d, 1978a) that I make comment on in this next and final section.

8.4 Resistance as becoming

The point of emphasising, as I have throughout this text, the ‘arbitrariness and violence’ of the constitutive and regulative power-knowledge of coupledom is not to argue for the redundancy of couple relationships or to render the coupled-subject either helpless or paralysed as can be a point of objection to a Foucauldian take on power.

Nor has my emphasis on regulation and governmentality held the intention of holding up control and domination as the only form of power circumscribing personal relationships. Indeed power is not always negative and repressive in its perpetual productivity and not exclusive to political control (Foucault, 1977a). Rather the point to a critical exegesis of individualising and normalising power (in any given social and personal domain) is to deny the necessity of, and so possibly resist, the valorised ‘liberties’ and ‘actualisations’ of a humanist psychology, the self-disciplines, ‘choices’ and entrepreneurship of (neo)liberalism, and the various mechanisms of understanding generated in the enlightened age of reasoning that propagate and order power no longer only (or most obviously) through the punishment of torture and death but rather through the management of life itself (Rose, 1999; Foucault, 1977a, 1987a).

This is a management in which the organisational forces of the current play of coupledom and its judging of various values as being of “ultimate concern” (Fromm, 1957: 90) play a significant part. In Rose’s words, post-structuralist and genealogical accounts of power that aim to destabilise the present and render it less necessary as it stands, serve to:

“[H]elp maximize the capacity of individuals and collectivities to shape the knowledges, contest the authorities and configure the practices that govern them in the name of their nature, their freedom and their identity. They seek a transvaluation of values, or at least to provide some of the conceptual tools and arguments which might enable a revaluation of those values by which we are ruled or governed, [unearthing] the supposedly pure and transcendental [truths]…which are inherent in these attempts to govern us for our own good, the costs as well as the benefits entailed, for example, in the nineteenth-century valorization of self-discipline…or

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1 For example, in relation to the prescriptive deployment of sexuality as theorized by Foucault (1978a), Grosz (1994) argues that in being confined to discourse it is not made clear how gendered bodies, pleasures and identities can be reconfigured outside of the terms of this deployment.
the late twentieth-century valorization of an image of personal freedom marked out in terms such as autonomy, choice and self-realization…”

(Rose, 1999: 282)

For Foucault, such accounts assist with the location and marking of “the weak points, the openings, the lines of force” in “the inertias and constraints of the present time” (Foucault, 1977, cited in Miller, 2000: 189; cf. Foucault, 1971). Or again as Rose puts it, they assist with a modification to our relationship to Truth “through the problematisation of what is given to us as necessary to think and do” so as to make it “more difficult for us to think and act in accustomed ways” and thus clear “a space for the possibility of thinking otherwise” (Rose, 1999: 277).

In carrying through a Foucauldian line of argument wherein power is seen as being always tied to resistance as much as to domination, the opening up of possibility for a different way of thinking, doing, and being is not just a matter of challenging mechanisms of control and regulation. A critique of power also involves questioning cultural moves of resistance which as much as any other form of production configure the ways in which coupledom (or madness, sexuality, gender, and so on) is currently governed and which can covertly reproduce traditional domains of power-knowledge particularly by ascribing to and deploying liberal-humanist radicalism and its politics of identity (cf. Henriques et al, 1984; Kitzinger, 1987; 1989; Butler, 1990; Stainton Rogers and Stainton Rogers, 2001). For Foucault (1977d, 1978a, 1981b), feminist and gay liberation movements should not simply aim for the liberation of sexual desire or identity but rather of the general ‘economy of pleasure’ that extends beyond sexual norms. As such I argue for a re-thinking of current ‘resistances’ to couple/conjugal tradition that does not just target monogamous and dyadic sexual norms as the principle ‘enemy’ or ‘repressor’ while leaving firmly in place the constitutive, disciplining and moderating ‘pleasures’ of emotional fidelity and self-actualisation, the maximum security of trust, dyadic bondedness and containment, and the regulatory (normalising) illuminations of intimate disclosure and authenticity. That is to say, that which is to be challenged is not simply sexual monogamy or moral prohibition but that series of equally coercive fidelities that we enact on ourselves in the name of one kind of truth and way of Being and to which we exclusively relate without ever knowing another. So that other kinds of relations to ourselves and to another that are not tied to the discursive enactments and requirements of a pre-prescribed ‘truth’ can be made possible, it is I believe
necessary to critique the pervasiveness of these ‘pleasurable’ and ‘satisfying’ forms of stabilising ‘truth’ (such as emotional containment and authenticity) as re-igniting the same constrictive binary axes of inner-outer, order-chaos, security-insecurity, and wholeness-lack; as intensifying the mechanisms of panoptic power in the twenty-first century imperatives of couple openness, disclosure and honesty; and as calling for technologies of ethical self-discipline that continue to render us and our relationships governable.

I have critiqued the non-monogamous and extra-dyadic forms of resistance as limited and tentative in that they continue to rely on a largely unreconfigured power-knowledge and its various containments of authenticity for their impetus, verification and authority. In the experiences of non-conventional partnerships as I have recorded people expressing them, and as I have interpreted these expressions, there appears to be a reiteration and a drawing over of an already established power-knowledge of coupledom that depends, for one thing, on a liberalist and contractual reasoning of promise, security, freedom, rights and duties – one that authorises a one-dimensional ‘norm’ of health and fulfilment. The so-called ‘transformed’ intimacies, intensities and identities that continue to be celebrated as heralding a newly awakened self/relationship ‘freedom’ (e.g. Giddens, 1992; Weeks et al, 2001; Weeks, 2004) can, I have argued, be challenged as being predicated on pervasive norms of ‘health’ and ‘freedom’ that continue to both spring from and affirm norms of ‘maladjustment’, ‘insecurity’, ‘superficiality’ and ‘lack’. And the normalising mechanisms and visibilities of containment and authenticity – both inextricably linked to norms of ‘health and ‘freedom’ – continue to be the mechanisms for the generation of non-monogamous or extra-dyadic ‘truth’ such that the same relation to the same kind of truth is clung to and thus perpetuated.

It is for these reasons and because of what it can potentially show up in relation to the current everyday management of ‘healthy’ couples and coupled-selves that I have given a critical account of liberal-humanist theory and its various advocacies of open-marriage and non-monogamous sexual practice since the cultural revolution of the 1960s and 70s. In this I have not aimed to dismiss sexual non-monogamy or non-dyadic structure, as these are talked about and practiced by people involved in this research, as not in some way functioning as “laboratories for alternative futures” (Rose, 1999: 279) and as potentially creating something new at the edges of conventional politics, traditional experience and ways of relating. But I regard a more fundamental destabilisation of the pervasive ‘relation to truth’ imperative and
its regulative forms of play as being necessary if “affective and relational virtualities” (Foucault, 1981b: 138) are to be opened that might no longer work to maintain the ‘fulfilled’ subject and ‘healthy’ relational intensities as necessarily regular, predictable, stable and moderate as currently required by the contain(able) authenticities of the conformist and transformed couple relationships.

So, then, how might this destabilisation in a re-thinking of resistance be made to occur at the levels of conception and experience? While such a question remains an ongoing politico-philosophical concern, a useful starting point would seem to be to unhinge ourselves and our partnerships from a binary thinking where we do not aspire to territorialised essences, retreat into containments or assimilate and affirm an interiorised and centralising form of truth. While we can neither think or re-evaluate outside of language and the present discursive system (Derrida, 1976), to understand the values we live by as always being (at least potentially) under erasure (ibid.) - that is, as being the mirage of language can, as Derrida (1976) argues, nonetheless occur. As Nietzsche, Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze (with his sometimes co-author Guattari) and Butler have all emphasised in arguing for a non-binary system of thought as that which may propel a different kind of becoming from those imposed by the coded matrixes matrices of gender, sexuality, mental health (and so on) and by a structuralist ontology and social order more generally, it is a question of exploring and occupying the space of an untamed exteriority and power. It is to not close off experience as a way of confirming and preserving ourselves and our world (Nietzsche, 1887a). Rather it is to foster de-territorialised, de-centered, horizontal (non-prioritised) flows of desire that “can yield intense relations not resembling those that are institutionalised” (Foucault, 1981b: 138) – relations, that is, that are not already coded in terms of a structuralist verticality or a certain mode of absence, lack or chaos. It is to dig channels that are not restricted by the disciplinary and individualising flows or ‘norms’ of egoistic desire, love, fears and anxieties that lead to the production of docile and obedient subjects who are constituted in and made to account for themselves in a seeming totality and unity (Deleuze and Guattari, 1977; cf. Deleuze, 1953; Deleuze and Parnet, 1987). In this, coupledom could be made to de-assume its apparent unity, totality and ‘fullness of life’ that are founded on lack and what it absents, evacuates and excludes from its domain such that relationships could be realigned with an altogether different and certainly less tranquilising current of life.
Like the anti-humanist and transformative politics of Nietzsche and Foucault, but unlike the kind of existential transformation Giddens (1992) postulates, the anti-Oedipal politics of Deleuze and Guattari (1977, 1980; cf. Grosz, 1994) seeks the transformation of human relationships in a struggle against the current productions of power rather than merely domination. This is a transformation or art of living where relationships between people either as couples or families are not relations of an ‘either/or’ exclusion brought about by dichotomised and hierarchical territories or totalities but where there are multiple connections and new social arrangements in a freeing up of spaces where desire is not thought of as personal energy under personal control but as yet unexplored power or energy. In short, the pluralism of Deleuze and Guattari calls for the non-exclusive and non-restrictive use of what they refer to as the ‘disjunctive synthesis’ (see chapter five), a synthesis or way of connecting that they suggest is currently used in a negative way in its taste for exclusive disjunctions. These theorists see a more inclusive and affirmative use of the connective system as one in which subjects and structures can take their bearings from both presence and absence at once and which can span various spaces and distances. It is, as Foucault (1977c) reads Deleuze and Guattari, to develop action, thought and desire by proliferation and positive (non-exclusory) disjunction and not by “subdivision and pyramidal hierarchisation” (Foucault, 1977c: xiii). It is to not form interpersonal alliances according to the quasi-sacred forms of power and accesses to truth – those of law, limit, lack, containment and authenticity – but to prefer what is positive, multiple and irregular where multiplicity or irregularity are not the obverse of something but refer only to themselves. It is to prefer flows over unities and mobile arrangements over systems: to “believe that what is productive is not sedentary but nomadic” (ibid.: xiii).

Questioning the over-coded domain of coupledom is not a question of relinquishing ourselves or each other but involves foregoing a tranquilising relation to truth that depends on, and calls for, coherence, rationality, order, teleology and completion. It involves taking up the challenge of entering into zones of unpredictability, non-progression and non-permanence (Deleuze and Guattari, 1977). In exploring what nomadic, inclusive, non-totalising, and perhaps episodic connections might look like outside of an institutionalised, contained and (emotionally) exclusive non-monogamy, it doesn’t follow that couple relationships would in any way be less significant, meaningful or purposeful, despite a different, non-normalising criteria for these standards being necessary. But it would mean
that we’d have to deterritorialise, reinvent and reconstitute the desires, pleasures, securities, freedoms, meanings and subjectivities that we currently see ourselves as being capable of as people and couples. To leave off a play of resistance that imitates and reproduces more of the same in its concern for lack, actualisation, and individualising desire is to creatively pursue uncoded, polymorphic lines of becoming which are not tied to the contained and authentic unities of persons and relationships.

In this, a re-thinking of coupledom and a filling of other possible spaces can begin from a “background of emptiness” and perhaps launch “a truly unavoidable challenge of the question: What can be played?” (Foucault, 1981b: 139-140) - a challenge that does not aim to change only “people’s consciousness or what’s in their heads but the political, economic, institutional regime of the production of truth” (Foucault, 1977e: 133). As Nietzsche (1883: 55) once remarked, “to create new values – even the lion is incapable of that”, but to create the conditions for a creative current of life that is not already bound to the regimented production of truth and the psychologised individual as they stand in a structuralist ontology of vertical relations, to dislocate the regulative grid of opposition by which meaning is produced and de-psychologise the couple ‘home’ as being no longer dependent on content or interior or centre - “that the might of the lion can do”. And so, as Nietzsche (1883: 139) admonishes, “let everything that can break upon your truths – break! There is many a house still to be built!”
LIST OF REFERENCES


References


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## APPENDIX A: TABLE OF PARTICIPANTS

Table of participants showing age, self-identified sexuality, self-identified relationship category, and relationship duration. (Names have been changed for anonymity.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Sexuality</th>
<th>Relationship Category</th>
<th>Relationship Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Allan+</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Gay</td>
<td>M(co)</td>
<td>11 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ricky</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Gay</td>
<td>M</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ryan+</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Gay</td>
<td>NM2(co)</td>
<td>8 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peter</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Gay</td>
<td>NM2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrew+</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Gay</td>
<td>NM1(co)</td>
<td>A+B=10 yrs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barry</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Gay</td>
<td>NM1</td>
<td>A+B+M=17 mths</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Gay</td>
<td>NM1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brian#</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>Gay</td>
<td>NM1(co)</td>
<td>3 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adam#</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>Gay</td>
<td>M(co)</td>
<td>1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barbara+</td>
<td>'mid 40s'</td>
<td>Lesbian</td>
<td>NM2(co)</td>
<td>14 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christine</td>
<td>'mid 40s'</td>
<td>Lesbian</td>
<td>NM2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth#</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Lesbian</td>
<td>M(co)</td>
<td>4 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebecca#</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>Lesbian</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>5 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tricia+</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>M(co)</td>
<td>4 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>M</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angela+</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>M(co)</td>
<td>2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominic</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>M</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachael+</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>M(co)</td>
<td>29 years†*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joe</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>M</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marianne+</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>3 years.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ken</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>M</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Identity</td>
<td>Relationship Status</td>
<td>Duration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clare+</td>
<td>‘mid 30s’</td>
<td>Heterosexual (B)</td>
<td>NM2(co)‡</td>
<td>14 years†*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethan</td>
<td>‘mid 30s’</td>
<td>Heterosexual (B)</td>
<td>NM2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samantha+</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Bisexual</td>
<td>NM1</td>
<td>9 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rodney</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>NM1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geraldine#</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Heterosexual (B)</td>
<td>M(co)</td>
<td>9 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Max#</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Heterosexual (B)</td>
<td>NM2</td>
<td>2 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tyler</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>Heterosexual (B)</td>
<td>NM2</td>
<td>No relationship∞</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(n = 28\)

+ = Indicates the participant is in a relationship with the participant/s listed immediately below

# = Partner did not participate for various reasons (e.g. did not agree to or attend an arranged interview)

M = Indicates a sexually and emotionally monogamous relationship

NM1 = Indicates a sexually non-monogamous relationship that is emotionally exclusive and does not involve ‘secondary’ relationships

NM2 = Indicates a sexually non-monogamous relationship that is not emotionally exclusive and can involve ‘secondary’ relationships

(B) = Indicates a participant’s reference to past, present or intended bisexual practice while self-identifying as heterosexual prior to interview

(co) = Indicates a co-habiting relationship at the time of interview

† = Legally married

‡ = Were sexually and emotionally monogamous for the first 13 years of their marriage and have practiced sexual and emotional non-monogamy for 12 months prior to interview

* = Have young or adult children

∞ = Has previously been involved in polyamorist (group marriage) relationships
APPENDIX B: COPY OF INFORMATION STATEMENT

INFORMATION STATEMENT

Working Title: THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONS OF MONOGAMY AND NON MONOGAMY ¹

Ethics Registration No: HE2000 / 082

RESEARCHER & INTERVIEWER: MARK FINN

Thank you for your initial response regarding possible participation in the abovementioned research. This information precedes you giving your fully informed written consent at a later date, should you choose to.

The Research:

• The research is being undertaken to fulfil the requirements of a PhD degree in Critical Psychology. The research will preferably involve talking to both/all partners currently involved in a relationship about their thoughts, opinions and experiences to do with monogamy and non-monogamy, as applicable. One person in the relationship can still be interviewed should the other partner/s not be willing. Following this, the research will investigate ways in which thoughts, opinions and experiences are produced and shaped by society as a whole. It is emphasised that the purpose of the research is neither to 'analyse' you personally nor your relationship, or to judge in any way, but to respectfully listen to what you have to say.

• You are being asked to participate in this research because you and your partner/s both agree that you are in a monogamous or non-monogamous relationship and are heterosexual, bisexual or homosexual. For the purpose of this research, a monogamous relationship is taken to mean one in which the sexual activity of both partners is said to take place within the relationship. Non-monogamous relationships are taken to include those in which sexual activity of one or both partners can occur outside the relationship in full knowledge of both partners. Of course there are variations on these themes and rigid categories can be problematic. This research is respectful of such variation.

• The benefit to you in participating is that you will be contributing to critical psychological theory and knowledge that, in its application, will potentially be of interest and useful to the wider population and to practising psychologists, counsellors and therapists.

¹ Note that the working title and description of research stated in this Information Sheet differs from the thesis title and the focus of research that eventuated. Reasons for the change in focus are stated in Chapter three (see Footnote on page 87).
The Procedure:

- The procedure will be for you and your partner to talk to the researcher separately. It will be like an informal conversation where the researcher will not be asking you a specific list of questions. The interview will be recorded on audio-tape for the purposes of transcription. As a guide, the interview will last for about 60 minutes. You will be asked about your understandings and experiences of monogamy, non-monogamy, intimacy and relationships.

Your comfort, privacy and safety:

- Obviously you are being asked to talk about some personal and perhaps private matters. You will, however, not be obliged to talk about things you choose not to. Your privacy and that of your partner/s will be respected. You will not be asked to divulge private and personal matters concerning your partner in his or her absence, nor they of you. You will have the right to stop the interview at any time without explanation or consequence.

- At the conclusion of the project, all participants will have access to written reports on the research if required.

- Full measures will be taken to ensure confidentiality and your anonymity. You will not be identified on the audio recording or on any written material resulting from it. Extracts from transcripts may appear in papers, presentations and reports about this research with all names and identifying references being changed. Research data will be kept securely and accessed only by the named researcher during the project. A copy of the transcription of your anonymous interview will be kept on computer disk after completion of the research and all audiotapes destroyed.

- You are quite free to decide whether or not to participate and to withdraw at any time without explanation, disadvantage or consequence. You should not feel coerced into participating if you are not willing.

Please contact me should any aspect of this statement be unclear, concerns you, or if you would like to discuss things further.

**CONTACT DETAILS:**

**Home: (number supplied) - Mobile: (number supplied) - Email: (address supplied)**

**NOTE:** This study has been approved by the University of Western Sydney Human Ethics Review Committee. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Ethics Committee through the Research Ethics Officer (tel: 02 47 360 169). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.
APPENDIX C: COPY OF CONSENT FORM

STATEMENT OF INFORMED CONSENT

THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONS OF MONOGAMY AND NON-MONOGAMY

1. I have read and understood the Information Statement pertaining to this research.

2. The purpose and nature of the research have been explained to me.

3. I understand why I am being asked to participate and what my involvement will be.

4. I am aware of the participant group with which my partner and I are to be associated and agree with this identification.

5. Possible consequence(s) of my participation have been explained to me and understood by me.

6. I understand that the information I provide in this interview will be recorded, transcribed, and used in various publications and presentations of the research.

7. I understand that my participation will be confidential at all times during and after the research.

8. Any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.

9. I freely, and without coercion, agree to participate in this research and understand that I may withdraw at any time without consequence or penalty.

Name of participant: ...........................................................................................................

Signature of participant: .....................................................................................................

Date: ........................................

NOTE: This study has been approved by the University of Western Sydney (Nepean) Human Ethics Review Committee. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Ethics Committee through the Research Ethics Officer (tel: 02 47 360 169). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.
APPENDIX D: COPY OF RECRUITMENT NOTICE

PhD research into monogamy/non-monogamy. Call for participants

I am currently doing a PhD in Critical Psychology (University of Western Sydney), exploring ways in which people understand and experience monogamy or non-monogamy in their couple relationships.

I am looking to recruit heterosexual, gay, lesbian, transgender, queer and bisexual people based in Sydney who are involved in either a monogamous or a consensually non-monogamous relationships to participate in my research. Participation will involve an informal and non-judgemental interview/chat with me where people will be asked to talk about their understandings and/or experiences of monogamy and non-monogamy. The benefit in participating is that participants will be contributing to critical psychological theory and knowledge that, in its application, will potentially be of interest and useful to the wider population and to practising psychologists, relationship/marriage counsellors and therapists.

This research has University Ethical Approval and interviews last for approximately one hour. If both partners consent to be interviewed, each will be interviewed separately and participation will of course be strictly anonymous and confidential, with the comfort and safety of participants protected throughout. I would be interested in talking to individuals should both parties not be willing.

My contact details are:

Mark Finn
Email: (address supplied)
Phone: (number supplied)

Please feel free to contact me should further detail or information be required. Those interested are welcome to contact me directly, whereupon I will provide further information and answer any questions.

Thank you in anticipation,

Mark Finn