CHAPTER ONE

THE INVENTION OF THE MODERN HOMOSEXUAL

... lesbianism provides for the moment the only social form in which we can live freely. Lesbian is the only concept I know which is beyond the categories of sex (woman and man), because the designated subject (lesbian) is not a woman, either economically, or politically, or ideologically.¹

The claim that "lesbians are not women",² in the context of a feminist critique of patriarchal social relations, proved to be crucial to the ascendance of lesbian feminism in the 1970s. Annamarie Jagose³ notes that feminists’ attempts to secure a space beyond patriarchy has often depended on the category 'lesbian'. Representing a space 'beyond' the categories of sex (woman and man), the 'lesbian' is ostensibly 'outside' relations of male domination and patriarchal systems of signification. As I show throughout this thesis, a 'lesbian utopics' works, in conjunction with other formulations, to promote 'the lesbian' as the quintessential feminist and lesbianism as a revolutionary practice. Consequently, within the contemporary women's movement, lesbianism has provided a powerful site of feminist identification and investment.

But, as I show in this chapter, the lesbian is not so much ontologically transgressive and subversive of patriarchal relations and conceptual frameworks as she is implicated in them. Against the representation of lesbianism and the lesbian in the epigram for this chapter, male and female homosexuality can be shown to be necessary categories of gender (as well as sexual deviance) which function precisely to stabilize categories of normative (heterosexual) masculinity and femininity. The category 'lesbian' gains its cultural intelligibility from such signifying systems, even as an 'unspeakable' and suppressed presence. As Jagose puts it: "the utopic theorization of 'lesbian' inadvertently illustrates that

² Ibid., p.32.
what poses as subversion may, in fact, be complicit with that which it
purports to subvert.4

Drawing on the work of lesbian and gay historians to support this
claim, this chapter identifies the social, political and discursive conditions
of emergence of the modern homosexual. Nineteenth century medical
and psychiatric discourses' construction of the 'lesbian' as a category of
gender non-conformity is highlighted. Following Foucault, I am
specifically concerned with the regimes of normalization and regulation
installed by these discursive practices. But I also show how the regime
itself provided the conditions for organized resistance. My purpose here
is to sketch an historical background to the emergence of the
contemporary lesbian and gay movements in the 1960s.

I. THE EMERGENCE OF THE MODERN HOMOSEXUAL

The lesbian as a distinct (albeit aberrant) personage was, to paraphrase
Rubin,5 one of the figures who marched out of the medical textbooks of
the late nineteenth century and on to the pages of social history. This
critical period in the history of sexual regulation in Western societies saw
the transformation of homosexual acts (specifically, sodomy), which until
that time were seen as offences before the eyes of God or a crime that
any (mainly male) person could commit against the state and the marital
code, into expressions of a disposition within homosexual people.6 In
Foucault's famous words: "The sodomite had been a temporary
aberration; the homosexual was now a species".7

Before the late nineteenth century, when the term and concept
'homosexual' emerged,8 it seems subcultures of what we today would

4 Ibid., pp.5-6.
5 Rubin, 'Thinking Sex', p.287.
7 Ibid., p.43.
8 According to historians, the term 'homosexual' first appeared in 1869 in the context of debates on the
recriminalization of homosexual practices in Germany at the time of unification. Until then, the German states, as in
much of Europe, had operated under the Napoleonic code, introduced in the early 19th Century, in which
homosexual acts were not a crime (B. D. Adam, The Rise of a Gay and Lesbian Movement, New York, Twayne
p.43.
describe as male homosexual transvestites existed in fourteenth century Italy, fifteenth century France and sixteenth century Britain. By the late seventeenth century male homosexual transvestites were a distinct enough group to form clubs in London and other British cities, and in France and Holland. By the eighteenth century, homosexual and transvestite meeting places, taverns and clubs were being exposed and discussed in the contemporary literature. Cultures of cross-dressing male homosexuals also existed in nineteenth century Australia.

It was not unknown for women in the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries to dress and pass as men if they desired a greater freedom than women at that time were permitted. Women passed as men in order to travel safely and gain work, but there is no evidence for the existence of any subculture of female transvestites. Given that the public sphere was until recently a male preserve, and women were generally less mobile, female homosexuals did not develop public cultures in advanced industrial societies until the late nineteenth century.

The only legislation which directly applied to homosexual behaviour before 1885 in Britain were laws against sodomy. In 1533 Henry VIII first brought sodomy (defined as acts of buggery between man and woman, man and beast and man and man) within the scope of statute law. This law imposed the death penalty upon conviction, even for homosexual acts other than sodomy, a penalty which was not removed until 1861 in England and Wales, and 1889 in Scotland. In practice, however, the death penalty was not applied after the 1830s. In colonial Australia, whose laws were derived from British law, the last execution for sodomy

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9 Weeks, Coming Out, p.35.
14 Weeks, Coming Out, pp.11-14.
in what was then Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania) took place in 1863.\textsuperscript{15} Men were executed for sodomy in colonial America into the seventeenth century.\textsuperscript{16}

Female sodomy was codified in the laws of Orleans in 1260 and was punishable by burning to death on the third offence. The penalty of death by burning for female sodomy was also decreed in the laws of the sixteenth century Holy Roman Empire of Emperor Charles V.\textsuperscript{17} In most cases of execution under these statutes in Europe from the sixteenth to early eighteenth centuries, the accused women were transvestites. These women passed as men, married women and used a dildo in sexual intercourse. Some women were executed under these laws for simply attempting to pass as men.\textsuperscript{18} In England, women were still being prosecuted for dressing as males into the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{19} After the mid-eighteenth century, however, it seems there were no further executions for female sodomy in America or Europe. And by the eighteenth century in England, imprisonment and public whipping or pillorying had replaced the death penalty.\textsuperscript{20}

Apart from sodomy, women engaging in same sex activity in seventeenth century colonial America could be charged with 'lewd behaviour'. Generally, however, it seems that female same-sex relations outside these parameters did not come under the purview of the law simply because sex without an 'instrument' (penis or penis substitute) was not recognized.\textsuperscript{21} Female same-sex activity without a penis substitute (tribadism) was seen by pre-nineteenth century medical men to


\textsuperscript{16} Faderman, Surpassing the Love of Men, p.51.

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., p.49.


\textsuperscript{19} Faderman, Surpassing the Love of Men, pp.49,50-51. According to Faderman (pp.29-31,47), the anxiety expressed through laws preventing women passing as men was a perceived demand by those women for masculine privileges.

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., pp.52-53.

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., p.149. Faderman reports that the 'lack of instrument' argument was used in a successful libel suit in the early nineteenth century by two female mistresses of a Scottish girls' boarding school against the grandmother of one of the pupils. The grandmother had accused the women of engaging in 'improper and criminal conduct' with each other.
be a form of mutual masturbation, or a disorder produced by masturbation.\textsuperscript{22}

Before the advent of nineteenth century sexology, men could sleep with men and women sleep with women without any suggestion of sexual impropriety.\textsuperscript{23} In her study of the changing historical definitions of female love relationships, Lillian Faderman traces 'romantic friendships' between Western middle-class women from their inception in the European Renaissance, to their peak in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, to their demise in the early twentieth century. Faderman argues that it is quite possible that, until the twentieth century, female same-sex love may not have been primarily sexual but, rather, affectional. Any sexual contacts that may have occurred within romantic friendships were not publicly admitted or referred to in diaries and letters. Faderman speculates that the silence of romantic friends on sexual matters was due to either its absence or to their adherence to the dominant social view that women ('good' women, at least) did not possess sexual desire. While romantic friendships were not seen as sexual relationships, they certainly involved kissing, fondling, sleeping together and passionate declarations of love and faithfulness. In many instances the women swore lifelong devotion, even living together in what were termed in the United States 'Boston Marriages', without exciting adverse comment. In this form, intimate relations between women were socially condoned.\textsuperscript{24}

Until the nineteenth century, according to Faderman, there was no evidence that women involved in romantic friendships had the slightest sense of wrongdoing or that their affection for each other constituted an abnormality. Even up to the 1850s nothing in their correspondence to each other suggested that they felt guilty or anxious about their relationship. Nor did they feel the need to be covert about their emotions or keep the relationship a secret from family and friends. But by the end of the nineteenth century in continental Europe, and a little later in the


\textsuperscript{23} Weeks, Against Nature, p.18; Faderman, Surpassing the Love of Men, pp.152,155.

\textsuperscript{24} Faderman, Surpassing the Love of Men, pp.15-16,74-75. A 'Boston Marriage' is defined by Faderman as a long-term monogamous relationship between two otherwise unmarried women. The women were usually feminists and professionals - i.e. 'New Women' (p.150).
United States and Britain, Faderman claims, romantic friendships were discredited, replaced by the fully sexualised and pathologised category of lesbianism.²⁵

Bio-power and the deployment of sexuality

The transformation of romantic friendships into 'lesbianism' and the demise of male friendships²⁶ occurred at the same time that homosexual acts came to be seen as manifestations of a homosexual type of person. This sexualization of all intimate relations along with the psychiatrization of same sex relations were both, to Foucault, effects of a 'deployment of sexuality'. The deployment of sexuality is a crucial arm of 'bio-power', a form of power Foucault claims began to emerge in seventeenth century Europe with the transition from sovereign to modern state forms of government. In the context of a rapid increase in productivity and resources in the eighteenth century, and the demographic growth it encouraged, bio-power was concerned with managing populations through administering life processes: fertility, birthrates, patterns of diet and habitation, migration, health and longevity. This task was in turn enabled by the newly emergent human sciences of statistics and demography.²⁷

Sex assumed its significance in modern regimes of governance, according to Foucault, by virtue of its location as the pivot of the two axes or poles of bio-power: longer-standing practices of disciplining the body (in schools, prisons and the military) and the new concern to control populations. Sex became a crucial target of bio-power because it enabled simultaneous access to the life of the body and the life of the species. Because of its central importance, sexual activity attracted increasing surveillance, analysis, regulation and intervention in tandem with the development of the institutions of the state and public administration. In the name of the rational ordering of modern societies,

²⁵ Ibid., pp.15-16,20,312.
²⁶ M. Foucault, 'Sex, Power and the Politics of Identity', The Advocate, No.400, August 1984, p.30, speculates that the disappearance of male friendship as a social relation in the late eighteenth century and the declaration of homosexuality as a social/political/medical problem are the same process.
²⁷ Foucault, The History of Sexuality, pp.25,116,136-139,142.
sexual activity changed from being primarily a moral concern to something to be regulated for the greater good of all.\textsuperscript{28}

In the context of the exigencies of bio-power in the eighteenth century, there was a political, economic and technical incitement to talk about sex. Initially, this took the form of stocktaking, classification and specification. By the nineteenth century, it had developed into an elaborate machinery for what Foucault called 'the transformation of sex into discourse': a technology that compelled and incited speech, analysis and investigation. If a proliferation of discourses on sex was essential to a proliferation of bio-power, then so too were the institutional sites of their elaboration. Hence the ascendance of medicine and psychiatry, whose increasing authority was linked to developments in the biological sciences.\textsuperscript{29}

In organizing and managing populations through measurement and appraisal, bio-power works to segregate and rank individuals and behaviours through distributing them around a norm. Norms, increasingly incorporated into the apparatuses of law, medicine and public administration, assumed an increasing importance as a mode of government. In the process, the major function of these apparatuses themselves was transformed and extended into one of regulation.\textsuperscript{30} The result was what Foucault called a "normalizing society . . . the historical outcome of a technology of power centred on life".\textsuperscript{31}

In this regulatory regime, the medical and biological sciences served to create the norms of human sexual behaviour. The term 'sexuality', according to Foucault, emerged at the turn of the nineteenth century as the correlate of the discursive practices of a newly formed science of sex. The development of a science of sex was only possible once sex had been conceptualized as a separate and potentially isolatable biological or psychical instinct. Sexuality was constituted as a domain which by nature was susceptible to pathological processes and thereby potentially amenable to therapeutic (normalizing) interventions. Sexology's task was

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., pp.23-26,116,139-141,143,145.
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., pp.20,30-33,36.
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., pp.30-31,89,141.
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., p.144.
to catalogue, categorize, analyse and speculate on the cause of all the forms of anomalies which could afflict the sex instinct.\textsuperscript{32}

At the same time, medical science was developing a particular concern with the sexual physiology of women which would medicalize women's bodies and their sex. This 'hysterization' of women's bodies saw women's whole being reduced to their sexuality and the 'pathological' effects of their reproductive organs. For Foucault, the integration of women and sexual deviants into the sphere of medical and psychiatric practice through their medicalization and psychiatrization was a sign that they were particular targets of surveillance, regulation or normalization.\textsuperscript{33}

Bio-power's object in medicalizing women's bodies, according to Foucault, was the regulation of reproductive sexuality. The psychiatrization of sexual aberration, while ostensibly one of eradication, in practice worked to establish a whole medico-sexual regime which, Foucault argues, actually encouraged 'perversion' so as to manage it.\textsuperscript{34}

As I go on to discuss in the next section, however, the medicalization of women's bodies and the psychiatrization of female homosexuality not only enabled regulation of women and lesbians, but was also usefully deployed against nineteenth century feminism.

**Nineteenth century feminism**

The French revolution and the Age of Enlightenment had opened up a theoretical and political space for the assertion of women's equality and civil rights.\textsuperscript{35} Organized feminism emerged in the U.S., Britain and continental Europe in the mid-1800s. By the end of the century, through the efforts of feminists, new employment and education opportunities created by social and economic developments were increasingly available to middle-class women. Besides traditional occupations such as governess and teacher, women could now enter the professions and

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., pp.54,68-69,105,116-117.

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., pp.54,104,116,146-147.

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., pp.41-42,44.

take up positions as public officials. There were new opportunities in retailing, and in clerical and secretarial work in the public and private sectors. These ‘New Women’, as educated working women were called, were amongst the leaders of the socialist and union movements, women’s suffrage and other feminist reform movements of the nineteenth century.36

The economic independence and autonomy that many middle-class women gained through paid work and new property and inheritance rights reduced the financial necessity for marriage. Many New Women chose not to marry, given the subjected condition of married women at that time. Some New Women also lived together in ‘romantic friendships’. Changing social attitudes also meant that single women could now live outside their families without being regarded with suspicion, a possibility that was also encouraged by the increasing availability of rooms and flats. Women who worked or campaigned together often shared accommodation to offset the costs.37

These developments in women’s education and employment, along with their concomitant increased independence from men and time spent together, soon became the subject of social concern. From the 1830s, Faderman reports, the efforts of feminists were met with derision and public ridicule. Grave concerns were expressed as to the social and personal effects of women’s education and growing independence. Women were warned of the enfeeblement and degeneration of their offspring, and of hysteria and other dire consequences for their own health. Educated and independent women were accused of wrecking the social order by undermining the institutions of marriage and the family. Worst, perhaps, were charges that women who stepped outside their proper role were ‘unsexed’, not true women, but instead ‘mental hermaphrodites’. The greatest concern was that women might lose their feminine sensibilities and domestic virtues and ‘turn into men’. The fear

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was that the distinction between the sexes, and the social order built on it, would collapse.  

The medicalization of women and the psychiatrization of sexual aberrations is located, therefore, in the context of a more general concern about the changing relations between the sexes (at least in the American and European middle-classes), initiated by the social, political, economic and intellectual developments of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The popular characterizations of educated women and feminists, outlined above, had, by the late nineteenth century, been coded by medical science and sexology as pathologies of the female sex. At the same time, longer-standing notions about the natures of men and women and their proper role in society were rearticulated along biological lines as the natural order verified through science. This operation generated gender norms, purportedly derived from nature, and naturalized the social inequality of the sexes.

'Natural' women and men

In determining the 'natural' temperaments and capacities of men and women, nineteenth century medical scientists looked to biology, specifically reproductive function. According to medical opinion, the male sex was by nature self-determining and self sufficient. Masculine aggression, strength and command derived from their sex drive which was motivated by an urge to propagate the species. Accordingly, it was argued, men's sexuality was characterized as a primitive instinct to seize and conquer the female. Sexual conquest of women was proof of healthy, virile manhood.  

New discoveries in female reproductive function were used to validate conventional ideas about femininity and women's sexuality. Women were characterized in the medical literature as being by nature timid, weak, unstable and 'hysterical' by virtue of the debilitation and incapacitation.

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induced by their reproductive organs and their functions. The middle-class nineteenth century woman, at least, was a 'natural' invalid. Dominated by their reproductive function and its attendant afflictions, women properly belonged to the realm of nature and the private sphere.\textsuperscript{41} Thus prominent nineteenth and early twentieth century sexologist, Havelock Ellis, could claim:

Women's special sphere is the bearing and rearing of children, with the care of human life in the home. Man's primary sphere remains the exploration of life outside the home, in industry and invention and the cultivation of the arts.\textsuperscript{42}

Women's sexuality was, however, more open to debate. While definitions of the nature of women's sexuality were generally consistent - as entirely dependent on men's, responsive and submissive or defined in terms of a 'maternal instinct' - opinion on female sexual desire was divided. Positions on the matter ranged from the predominant view that women possessed no sexual desire at all to claims of female sexual insatiability. In all these formulations of 'natural' men and women, and discussions on female sexuality, a natural heterosexual orientation was implied. It was simply assumed that opposites attract. As such, heterosexuality passed without remark.\textsuperscript{43}

In these formulations, sexual difference, gender behaviour and sexuality were locked together as the 'biological imperative'. Against these claims, Thomas Laqueur argues that medical advances in reproductive anatomy did not dictate the necessity for a 'two sex' model. The constitution of men and women as opposite and incommensurate biological sexes was, rather, to Laqueur, a political assignation conferred, as I have noted, in a context of emerging feminism.\textsuperscript{44} Accordingly, the 'natural' differences between the sexes were soon used


\textsuperscript{42} Cited in Jeffreys, The Spinster and her Enemies, p.129.


\textsuperscript{44} Laqueur, op.cit., pp.152,154,163,169,175,193-194,197.
as an argument against female suffrage. As far as medical men were concerned, nature sanctified the social roles of men and women. As one put it (in the context of debates on female suffrage): "What was decided among the prehistoric protozoa cannot be annulled by an Act of Parliament".45

'Inverts', 'perverts', 'masculine women' and feminism

Medical science's attempt to stabilize traditional male-female social relationships and roles, through promoting them as the 'natural order', was contingent on the creation of categories of gender deviance. Concerns over the first signs of organized feminism - expressed in the idea that women who aspired to intellectual cultivation and male prerogatives were 'unsexed' - dovetailed with newly emerging conceptions of a pathological condition of 'sexual inversion'. By the late nineteenth century, as I show in this section, gender deviance could be associated with sexual aberration and feminists' efforts to achieve female suffrage could itself be conceived as 'unnatural'.

Medical and psychiatric science's task of cataloguing, classifying and analyzing sexual behaviours had, by the mid-nineteenth century, produced an increasing proliferation of aberrant sexual 'types'. These 'types' were, to the doctors and psychiatrists, the product of congenital abnormality. Karl Ulrichs, in the 1860s, for example, defined as 'urnings' men who 'felt like women towards men', a condition he described as 'a female soul in a male body'. In 1869, the German psychiatrist, Carl von Westphal, described a 'type' of person whose constitution was marked by an 'antipathic sexual instinct', defined as a 'congenital reversal of the sexual feeling' in relation to the 'natural' instinct proper to the sex to which that individual belonged. Westphal's earliest case studies included a woman who was sexually attracted to women and who had from childhood preferred to dress as a boy and play boys' games. In the manner of new discursive formations, a flood of similar 'cases' soon appeared in medical journals.46

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45 Weeks, Coming Out, p.90.
Westphal's influential disciples Richard von Krafft-Ebing (Psychopathia Sexualis, 1882) and Havelock Ellis (Studies in the Psychology of Sex: Sexual Inversion, 1897) built on his ideas. For Krafft-Ebing, 'antipathic' sexual feeling was a 'cerebral neurosis', "a functional sign of degeneration and a partial manifestation of a neuro- (psycho-) pathic state, in most cases hereditary". For both Krafft-Ebing and Ellis, sexual inverteds manifested an impulse to don the distinctive clothing of the sex they felt themselves to be. Ellis described the 'typical' female invert thus:

When they still retain female garments, these usually show some traits of masculine simplicity, and there is nearly always a disdain for the petty feminine artifices of the toilet. Even when this is not obvious, there are all sorts of instinctive features and habits which may suggest to female acquaintances the remark that such a person 'ought to have been a man'. The brusque energetic movements, the attitude of the arms, the direct speech, the inflexions of the voice, the masculine straightforwardness and sense of honour, and especially the attitude towards men, free from any suggestion either of shyness or audacity, will often suggest the underlying psychic abnormality to a keen observer.

In the habits not only is there frequently a pronounced taste for smoking cigarettes, often found in quite feminine women, but also a decided taste and toleration for cigars. There is also a dislike and sometimes incapacity for needlework and other domestic occupations, while there is some capacity for athletics.

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47 Krafft-Ebing, op.cit., p.338. See also pp.54,285,340. Krafft-Ebing also thought that inverted sexuality could be temporarily acquired under certain conditions (e.g. the army, boarding schools, prison) (p.285), and that a latent perverse sexuality may be developed in constitutionally 'tainted' individuals through contact with (seduction by)

persons of the same sex. In both these cases, removal from the circumstances or early treatment could effect a cure (pp.295-290,350). However, it was also possible on Krafft-Ebing's account to develop a 'lasting acquired antipathic sexual instinct' for which he held little hope for restoration to normalcy (p.297).

48 Cited in Jeffreys, The Spinster and her Enemies, p.106. Edward Carpenter (Love's Coming-of-Age, New York and London, Mitchell Kennerley, 1911, p.133) concurred with this characterization of the "extreme" type of 'homogenic' female which, to him only constituted a minority of 'uraniasts' (Carpenter's term for Ulrich's 'turnings'). Krafft-Ebing (op.cit., pp.366,398-399) adds a penchant for drinking to this list and similarly characterizes female sexual inverteds as preferring 'boys' play and mannerisms in childhood, science instead of arts in adulthood. He notes that 'uraniasts' may nearly always be suspected in females wearing their hair short, or who dress in the fashion of men, or pursue sports and pastimes of their male acquaintances, or in opera singers and actresses who appear in male attire on the stage by preference. Weeks notes that, according to sexologists, male inverteds could be distinguished by their inability to whistle and their penchant for the colour green (Against Nature, p.19). See also Chauncey, op.cit., pp.90-91.
As the case studies piled up (notably, of women confined to asylums or imprisoned for serious crimes such as murder), 'sexual inversion' came to be associated with insanity, suicide and murderous impulses. It is from these works that the idea of essential lesbian morbidity emerged.  

It was not long before 'sexual inversion' was directly associated with feminism. Sheila Jeffreys points out that Ellis's description of 'sexual inversion' included precisely those forms of behaviour for which the New Women and feminists were criticized. Ellis also thought that women of the professional and educated middle-class were most prone to inversion. In connecting the women's movement to an increase in homosexuality, Ellis was not surprised to find a concurrent increase in female criminality and insanity. 

Another sexologist, Edward Carpenter, claimed that feminists did not altogether represent their sex:

some are rather mannish in temperament; some are 'homogenic', that is inclined to attachments to their own sex rather than the opposite sex; women are ultra-rationalizing and brain cultured; to many, children are more or less a bore; to others, man's sex passion is a mere impertinence, which they do not understand, and whose place they consequently misjudge. It would not do to say that the majority of the new movement are out of line, but there is no doubt that a large number are; and the course of their progress will be correspondingly curvilinear.

In a similar vein, sexologist Iwan Bloch argued that:

52 Carpenter, op.cit., p.72. Elsewhere, Carpenter notes "a marked development of the homogenic passion among the female sex" in the women's movement (Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men*, p.189). Carpenter (op.cit., p.73) tempers his apparent antipathy towards feminists by suggesting that women's advance in this direction may well be what evolution holds in store for the human race. His main concern seems to be the implications of the deficiency of maternal instinct for the reproduction of the species.
there is no doubt that in the 'women's movement' - that is, in the
movement directed towards the acquirement by women of all
the attainments of masculine culture - homosexual women have
played a notable part.\textsuperscript{53}

For yet another German sexologist of the 1920s, the "men women"
who led the women's movement 'infected' other women with the desire to
be free of men and independent.\textsuperscript{54} The remarks of these men, as I show
in Chapter 3, resonate with those directed at second wave feminism of
the 1970s.

Against the 'congenital inversion' thesis, it became apparent that
women could become homosexual after having been previously married
or through living and working with other women, as, for example, in the
feminist cause. The gender inversion thesis could also not account for
female homosexuals who displayed a 'feminine' manner and appearance.
One writer's response to the first problem was to propose the possibility
of 'retarded inversion' in such cases.\textsuperscript{55} Ellis's response to both problems
was to draw a distinction between the 'true' invert and the 'false' invert, or
'pseudo' homosexual. His characterizations of 'true' and 'false' inversion
were clearly drawn from established models of masculinity and femininity,
heterosexual practice and assumptions about lesbian sexual practices. Ellis also therefore assumed that the use of dildos was
widespread amongst female homosexual couples.\textsuperscript{56}

The 'true' invert, to Ellis, could be distinguished through the presence
of three factors - girlhood crushes on other females; a congenital 'taint' (a
history of family neuroses), and a more or less distinct trace of
masculinity (sexual initiative, a penchant for transvestism, a strain of
violence), even in an otherwise 'feminine' woman. In Ellis's formulations,
anything might be a sign of incipient inversion, although his 'typical'
invert was a transvestite.\textsuperscript{57}

\textsuperscript{53} Cited in Jeffreys, The Spinster and her Enemies, p.108.
\textsuperscript{54} Faderman, Surpassing the Love of Men, p.336.
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid, p.248; Chauncey, op.cit., pp.94-96.
\textsuperscript{56} Weeks, Coming Out, p.66; Jeffreys, The Spinster and her Enemies, p.109; Bland op.cit., p.263.
\textsuperscript{57} Faderman, Surpassing the Love of Men, pp.241-244,247.
The 'false' invert, on the other hand, was, to Ellis, an otherwise normal woman who deviated from the proper path through the seduction of a 'true' invert. The 'false' invert could be identified by her feminine manner and appearance, her sexual passivity and her lower intelligence. In cases of 'pseudo' homosexuality, it was expected that, given the opportunity to have relations with men, the normal female instincts would be brought into play. Importantly, the 'tenderness and caresses' of romantic friends could now be reconceptualized as a form of 'pseudo' homosexuality.  

The appearance of homosexuality in feminists, according to sexologists, might also represent the awakening of a seed of congenital inversion. Hence, Ellis could claim that the women's movement promoted hereditary neurosis while others held the women's movement responsible for the 'diffusion' of pseudohomosexuality. Following the sexologists, some feminists were concerned to distance themselves from homosexual women in the movement and distinguish their 'innocent friendships' from 'sexual inversion'.

While most sexologists of the 'congenital' school saw homosexuality as a pathological condition, some argued that it was not necessarily a defect. Indeed, they claimed, homosexuality was quite compatible with intellectual functioning and, further, might even endow higher sensibilities. The 'intermediate' or 'third' sex, as 'sexual inverts' were called by these writers, was said to be superior because it represented individuals who embodied a perfect balance of male and female. Members (generally male) of the 'third sex', to their advocates (often themselves homosexual), therefore constituted an elite 'advanced guard' of a more enlightened civilization. From the 'third sex', it was claimed, a new humanity was evolving and from its ranks would emerge the leaders and masters of the coming race.

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59 Faderman, Surpassing the Love of Men, p.242.
60 Jeffreys, The Spinster and her Enemies, p.108.
61 Ibid., pp.115-121; Bland, op.cit., pp.288-290; Weeks, Coming Out, p.106.
62 Faderman, Surpassing the Love of Men, pp.315-316.
The leading exponent of these ideas in England at the turn of the century was Edward Carpenter. Carpenter referred to members of the 'intermediate' or 'third sex' as 'Uranians'. In the context of the feminist movement, Carpenter saw that Uranians, bearing, as they did, the sexual characteristics of one sex and the emotional characteristics of the other, might provide a valuable social service in mediating between the sexes. Carpenter speculated that, in advanced societies, the more evolved, healthy, androgynous, bisexual type of Uranian might become the norm.63

Congenital theories of homosexuality dominated the new science of sex in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. However, they were increasingly challenged by the growing influence of psychoanalytic theories. In contrast to the 'congenital' view of homosexuality as a pathology of sexual instinct, Sigmund Freud argued that it was, rather, a peculiarity of sexual object choice that could occur in the process of transition from infantile to adult forms of sexuality. Instead of constituting a distinct 'type' of person, Freud instead saw homosexuality and heterosexuality in both sexes as forms of the same sexual drive (libido). He also rejected the idea of 'sexual inversion', noting that a 'feminine' man could still be heterosexual, as could a 'masculine' woman.64

Female homosexuality, nevertheless, to Freud, was an outcome of a 'masculinity complex': a possible reaction by a woman to the necessary renunciation of childhood 'masculinity' in the course of developing normal, mature femininity, heterosexual object choice and adult, reproductive (vaginal) forms of sexuality. Women with a 'masculinity complex', to Freud, held the futile wish of at some time acquiring a penis (the superior counterpart to the 'insignificant' clitoris) and becoming a man. Similarly, disavowal of her essentially castrated state could lead a woman to the conviction that she does possess a penis, which, to Freud, could lead her to act like a man.65 For Freud, then, women's desire for

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63 Carpenter, op.cit., pp.139-140; Weeks, Coming Out, pp.26-27,30,75. Carpenter (op.cit., p.138) in this way contrasted the 'normal' and 'perfect' specimens of homogenic women (a 'masculine' temperament in a 'feminine' and gracious body) to 'extreme' homogenic women (a 'masculine' temperament in a masculinized body).

64 Weeks, Sexuality and Its Discontents, p.155. Chauncy's article (op.cit., passim) is concerned with the emergence and significance of the increasing distinction made in the medical literature between gender inversion and homosexuality, such as found in Freud's formulation, at the turn of the twentieth century. Chauncy reports that the gender inversion model of homosexuality was still predominant into the 1920s, however.

independence, self determination and intellectual development was motivated by nothing other than 'penis envy'. The connections between feminism and abnormality (homosexuality) had again been made.

The congenital and psychoanalytic theories of sexual aberration, along with the less popular but still current older idea of homosexuality as an acquired 'perversion' (a vice adopted by those of a weak nature), formed the basis of Western understandings of homosexuality until the mid-twentieth century. These models laid the grounds for debate and scientific enquiry on whether homosexuality was 'innate' or 'acquired', a debate that is still in progress today.

The great 'achievement' of nineteenth century sexology was the successful promotion of the idea that male domination and female subordination was an arrangement determined by nature and therefore beyond human intervention. In the process of constructing male and female gender norms by recourse to 'nature', doctors and psychiatrists constituted women's desire for educational opportunities, political enfranchisement, economic independence and self-determination as 'aberrant'. Gender aberrant behaviour was consigned to newly formed categories of sexual deviance which pathologized same-sex love and sexual activity. The understanding of homosexuality as gender 'inversion' or deviance can be dated from this time.

Deploying the concept of gender inversion, anti-feminist forces could then assert that only women who were abnormal or sexually aberrant could want to diverge from their biologically ordained social position and role. The spectre of 'sexual inversion' was in this way usefully evoked to discipline women and the emerging women's movement. Through sexological discourses, deviance from sex-roles was reconstituted as a medical problem. Consequently, feminism, when applied to the task of attaining male prerogatives of an education, career and political representation, was effectively depoliticized and its proponents discredited.  

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66 Weeks, Coming Out, pp.29,52; Chauncey, op.cit., pp.99-100.
67 For discussions of the decline of organized feminism, see Bland, op.cit.; Weeks, Faderman and Jeffrey's, works cited.
The medicalization of women and the psychiatrization of aberrant sexualities through production of categories of 'sexual inversion' were, as I have noted, strategies employed by bio-power through its 'deployment of sexuality'. In the next section, I consider the systems of surveillance, and the regulatory and normalizing operations brought to bear on the newly constituted homosexuals through what Foucault called the 'apparatus of sexuality': a system of relations existing between heterogeneous elements which includes not only discourses of sexuality, but institutions, regulatory decisions, laws, administration measures, scientific statements and moral propositions. Following Weeks and Rubin, I use the term 'social repression' to refer to the continuing formal and informal controls which have applied to homosexual behaviour.

II. REGULATION AND SOCIAL REPRESSION OF HOMOSEXUALITY

The law, discrimination, violence

The reordering of homosexuality through medical and psychiatric discourses of the late 19th century produced 'the homosexual' as a new subject of social surveillance and regulation. These developments were linked to new legal sanctions against male homosexuals. The Labouchere Amendment to the Criminal Law Amendment Act (1885) of England and Wales effectively brought all forms of male homosexual activity, whether in public or private, within the scope of the law. It provided for imprisonment of up to 2 years hard labour. The most notable conviction under this law was that of Oscar Wilde in 1895. In 1898, under the Vagrancy Act, soliciting of homosexual liaisons became punishable by 6 months imprisonment. These acts, along with child welfare laws covering age of consent, provided the legal framework for regulating male homosexuality in England and Wales until 1967.

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69 Weeks, Sex, Politics and Society, p.9; Rubin, Thinking Sex, p.277. Both Weeks and Rubin distinguish between repression of libido (as in the repressive hypothesis) and social/political repression, as in punitive legal regulation, discrimination and state-sanctioned harassment and violence against homosexuals and homosexual communities. I believe Foucault downplayed the significance of formal and informal mechanisms of social repression because, unlike the U.S., Britain and Australia, homosexual acts were decriminalized in France in the early nineteenth century. Only age of consent laws applied thereafter.

70 Weeks, Coming Out, pp.11,14-16,21-22.
In New South Wales, the Crimes Act of 1900 incorporated earlier legislation on sodomy and indecent assault and originally provided for penalties of up to life imprisonment. In 1924, an Amendment reduced the penalty to a maximum of 14 years. Provisions for soliciting, procuring and gross indecency were added in the early 1950s and attracted a penalty of a maximum 2 years imprisonment. Other convictions for homosexual acts in public were obtained under Acts covering public offences. This was the legal situation for male homosexuals in N.S.W. until 1984.\footnote{G. Wotherspoon, \textit{City of the Plain. History of a Gay Subculture}, Sydney, Hale and Iremonger, 1986, pp.22,109,113,116; N.S.W. Anti-Discrimination Board, \textit{Discrimination and Homosexuality}, Sydney, 1982, pp.292-295,299.}

Legal sanctions against female homosexuality \textit{per se} do not appear in modern statutes, although lesbians could be charged with disorderly conduct, offensive behaviour, disturbing the peace and running an indecent party as a result of police raids on bars, clubs and private homes.\footnote{Faderman, \textit{Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers}, pp.74,166,185; N.S.W.A.D.B., op.cit., pp.366-367.} Until 1976, lesbians in California could be prosecuted for committing oral copulation.\footnote{Rubin, 'Thinking Sex', p.305.}

Female homosexuality did, however, face the prospect of criminalization in England and Wales in 1921. Following World War 1, lesbianism had come to the public's attention through a series of scandals and libel suits. In response, an extension to the Labouchere Amendment of 1885 was proposed. This would have brought female homosexuality into line with male homosexuality in legal status and penalty. While the amendment was passed by the House of Commons it was rejected by the House of Lords.

There were two major, yet contradictory, objections to the proposed Amendment. One was that lesbianism was a sickness, and therefore outside the ambit of the law. The other objection rested on a concern that prosecutions, and the publicity they would generate, would 'spread' the offence. Here, the Lords were reflecting on developments from the Wilde trial in 1895 and the prosecution in 1898 of a bookseller for having sold copies of Havelock Ellis's 'lewd, wicked and bawdy' \textit{Sexual Inversion}. In the aftermath of these two events, sales of the book sky-rocketed, its ideas were widely disseminated, and a growing and increasingly vocal
homosexual subculture emerged, as did law reform movements. Prohibitive laws seemed to have produced the opposite of the intended effect. It is in this context that the Lords determined that the social repression of lesbianism should take the form of public silence.\footnote{Weeks, \textit{Coming Out}, pp.21,61,105-107; Jeffrey, \textit{The Spinster and her Enemies}, pp.113-115; Bland, \textit{op.cit.}, p.262.}

Criminalization of male homosexuality encouraged a regime of state harassment in the form of police raids on both gay and lesbian organizations and meeting places, particularly bars. Additionally, it condoned the police’s practice of ‘entrapment’ through solicitation as well as detention, bashings and blackmail. A frequent hazard of male homosexuals’ and lesbians’ lives has been (and still is) violent bashings, sometimes occasioning death.\footnote{Fademan, \textit{Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers}, p.184.} The ‘final solution’ to the ‘homosexual problem’ in Nazi Germany and its occupied territories was mass extermination. Homosexuals, branded by pink triangles, were sent to the gas chambers in their thousands.\footnote{Adam, \textit{op.cit.}, pp.53-59.} Periods of national anxiety, as in the ‘Cold War’ years of the mid-twentieth century, saw harassment of and violence towards homosexual individuals and communities escalate.\footnote{Fademan, \textit{Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers}, pp.122,140-144,149-159; Johnston and Johnston, \textit{op.cit.}, p.95; Adam, \textit{op.cit.}, pp.62-63; Weeks, \textit{Coming Out}, p.180; D’Emilio, ‘Capitalism and Gay Identity’, p.147; J. D’Emilio, ‘The Homosexual Menace: The Politics of Sexuality in Cold War America’, in Peiss and Simmons (eds), \textit{op.cit.}, pp.226-240.}

Concerns about blackmail and the implications for national security were ostensibly the reasons for military bans on homosexual men and women. Until 1992 in Australia, and in many places still, homosexuals of both sexes were/are subject to court martial and dishonourable discharge upon discovery. The routing out of homosexual men (in particular) and lesbians from the military and government in the U.S., and to a lesser extent in Britain, Australia and Canada, reached its height in the McCarthyist purges of the 1950s. Homosexuals, or even suspected homosexuals, along with communists, were some of the ‘dissidents’ hunted down and deprived of a livelihood in public service.\footnote{Wotherspoon, \textit{City of the Plain}, pp.76,110; Fademan, \textit{Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers}, pp.166,191; Johnston and Johnston, \textit{op.cit.}, pp.92,95; Adam, \textit{op.cit.}, pp.63-64; N.S.W.A.D.B., \textit{op.cit.}, pp.359-363,375-377. See also J. Kahn and P. A. Gozemba, ‘In and around the Lighthouse: Working-class Lesbian Bar Culture in the 1950s and 1960s’, in O. O. Kelly and S. M. Reverby (eds), \textit{Gendered Domains. Rethinking Public and Private in Women’s History}, Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press, 1992, pp.50-105.}

Employment in other public sectors such as teaching was also until recently off-limits to homosexuals on the unfounded assumption that children would be in danger of molestation. It was also feared that homosexual teachers might promote homosexuality to their young charges. On discovery of their sexual orientation, or upon conviction for homosexual offences, homosexual teachers, and sometimes university lecturers, were sacked or at least denied tenure. Even homosexual students did not escape - one U.S. college in the 1950s recommended that lesbians be routed out unless they were willing to undergo psychiatric treatment.\textsuperscript{79}

Lesbians and homosexual men were also subject to other forms of social repression and deprivation. Homosexuals were barred from immigration to the U.S. under a McCarthy-era law.\textsuperscript{80} Until recently, lesbians (and in some cases homosexual men) were routinely denied custody of their children upon divorce, often on the advice of psychiatrists, on the grounds of being 'unfit' parents.\textsuperscript{81}

**Representation and censorship**

Medical discourses of homosexual pathology, and their accompanying negative stereotypes of homosexual men and women, were widely disseminated through popular novels, magazines, newspapers, films and the theatre in the first half of the twentieth century. A dual tactic of encouraging the circulation of negative images and pathologizing accounts of homosexuality, while at the same time suppressing or censoring contrary opinion and evidence, controlled the public discourse on homosexuality until the 1960s.

Stereotypes of lesbian lowlife, decadence and lechery were first popularised in 1930s novels. Building on these representations, the image of the masculine, predatory lesbian had, by the 1950s, become a cinematic and pulp fiction convention. In her review of popular fiction

\textsuperscript{79} Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers*, pp.97,145,156; Adam, op.cit., p.63; N.S.W.A.D.B., op.cit., pp.471,478.
\textsuperscript{80} Adam, op.cit., p.65.
\textsuperscript{81} N.S.W.A.D.B., op.cit., pp.252-287.
from the 1930s to the 1950s, Faderman found that, with few exceptions, it promoted the view of lesbians as sick and evil, and doomed to a life of self-loathing and unhappiness often culminating in suicide. At the same time, the popular press in Australia, Britain and the U.S. published sensational stories of male and female homosexual subculture and reported salacious details of court cases involving homosexuals.

While sex education literature, novels, films and the popular press widely disseminated notions of homosexual perversion, magazines that projected a favourable image of homosexuality were the subject of confiscation and censorship. Faderman reports that, by the 1920s, such was the sensitivity to hostile public opinion about the idea of same sex love, that references to the close female relationships of prominent women were expunged from official biographies and published works. Even medical writings which promoted tolerance for homosexuality attracted prosecution for obscenity. Ironically, however, the publicity surrounding the 1928 British prosecution for obscenity and subsequent banning of Radclyffe Hall’s lesbian novel, The Well of Loneliness, achieved for lesbianism what the Wilde and Ellis trials achieved for male homosexuality in the 1890s and which the dropping of the 1921 attempt to criminalize lesbianism had hoped to prevent: the 'spread' of female homosexuality and the consolidation of lesbian communities.

Films played a large role in disseminating stereotypes of homosexuality and offering warnings of its dire effects. In his review of homosexuality in the cinema, film historian Vito Russo shows how the figure of the 'sissy' came to represent male homosexuality on screen. Homosexual men and women appeared in early films only to be punished or die in the end. Russo reports the first, if rather crass, effort at

82 Faderman, Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers, pp.101-102,146-147. See also Jeffreys, The Spinster and her Enemies, pp.121-127.
83 Johnston and Johnston, op.cit., p.93; Faderman, Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers, pp.136,145-146; Weeks, Coming Out, pp.159-163.
84 Faderman, Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers, p.146; Adam, op.cit., p.82; Wotherspoon, City of the Plain, pp.29-30.
85 Faderman, Surpassing the Love of Men, pp.174-176. Faderman gives the example of the censored 1924 and 1932 editions of letters by Emily Dickinson to Sue Gilbert.
86 Johnston and Johnston, op.cit., p.92.
87 Weeks, Coming Out, pp.107-109; Weeks, Sex, Politics and Society, pp.116-117.
censorship of homosexuality on screen. The 1919 German film, *Different from the Others* pleaded for tolerance of the 'third sex' on the grounds that homosexuality was a congenital inborn tendency. Nazis in Germany and Austria broke up the screenings and destroyed all the copies they could find.\(^{89}\) In the 1920s, several films were censored for their homosexual themes and in 1930 the U.S. Motion Pictures Production Code was created. The Code's three principles were that no picture should be produced which would lower the moral standards of those who see it; that the correct standards of life should be presented; that laws - divine or natural or human - should not be ridiculed, nor should sympathy be created for their violation. In 1934 the Code was tightened to prohibit direct references to homosexuality and homosexuals. Homosexuality was thereafter signified by complex visual codes - in the case of women, by androgynous figures.\(^{90}\)

One effect of this code was to expunge homosexuality from the plot of the novel or play on which the film was based, even if it was a central theme. In one notorious example, the 1936 film, *These Three*, a story of two female teachers accused of a homosexual liaison was transformed into that of an adulterous heterosexual triangle.\(^{91}\) In this climate, and until the Code was revoked in the 1960s, Hollywood actors and directors whose homosexuality was publicly known also found themselves 'blackballed' (denied work).\(^{92}\)

**Medicine and psychiatry**

The two schools of medical thought on homosexuality - the congenitalists, who saw homosexuality as innate, and the psychoanalysts, who (along with the older 'moral degeneracy' school) saw homosexuality as acquired - inaugurated quite different modes of regulation and intervention. Having constituted homosexuality as a


\(^{91}\) Russo, op.cit., p.63. The film was adapted from Lillian Helman's stage play *The Children's Hour*, which was based on the events outlined in footnote 21. See also Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers*, pp.103-104.

\(^{92}\) Russo, op.cit., p.45; Faderman (*Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers*, p.103) notes that attempts at a similar code for Broadway theatres failed.
'natural' (albeit abnormal) state, congenitalists ostensibly placed homosexuality outside the ambit of medical intervention. Where a differentiation was made between acquired homosexuality and congenital homosexuality, as in Krafft-Ebing, in the former case a 'cure' might be effected through hypnosis. 93 In other cases, however, treatments for homosexuality were not necessarily consistent with the theory of its aetiology. For example, homosexuals in continental Europe and the U.S. from the turn of the century were surgically castrated as a punishment for 'moral degeneracy'. 94

New developments in behavioural psychology, inspired by the Russian scientist Pavlov, were also applied to the problem of homosexuality. In this model, homosexuality was the outcome of early conditioning through which the sex impulse had been attached to the wrong stimulus. The behaviourist 'cure' for homosexuality, aversion therapy (essentially a 'reconditioning' of the sex impulse), involved the administration of nausea-inducing drugs or electric shock. Originally developed in the 1930s to treat alcoholism, by the 1960s aversion therapy was a common treatment for male and female homosexuality. 95

Endocrinial theories of homosexuality, which grew out of developments in hormone research in the 1930s and 1940s, speculated that homosexuality was a result of prenatal hormone imbalance. This view instigated a new regime of hormone treatments and manipulation of the endocrine system. Hormones were administered in an attempt to eliminate or at least reduce the sex drive of male homosexuals. 96 For women, hormone treatment could take the form of the surgical removal of an adrenal gland. 97

Whatever the scientific justification, and from whatever medical model, homosexuality in men and women in the 20th century has been

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93 Krafft-Ebing, op.cit., p.450; Weeks, Coming Out, p.31.
94 Weeks, Coming Out, p.31.
97 Faderman, Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers, p.100.
variously treated by psychosurgery, electro-convulsive therapy, genital surgery on women and administration of drugs, including LSD. Courts often ordered psychiatric treatment in lieu of a prison sentence for convicted homosexuals.

Psychoanalysis, particularly as it developed in the U.S., took to homosexuality with therapeutic zeal. In positing that homosexuality was a result of external influences which arrested the development of normal heterosexuality, Freud suggested it was possibly curable. However, he was doubtful as to the efficacy of any treatment:

In general, to undertake to convert a fully developed homosexual into a heterosexual does not offer much more prospect of success than the reverse, except that for good practical reasons the latter is never attempted.

Freud did, however believe an adjustment was possible and psychoanalysts have instigated lengthy regimes of therapy involving reworking the conditions of 'libidinal arrest'.

As the medical profession replaced the church as the moulder of public opinion on issues of sexuality, doctors and psychiatrists extended their influence and advice. Havelock Ellis observed in 1902 that women's colleges were the great breeding ground of lesbianism. This concern led to calls by other medical experts for parents to institute a regime of surveillance of their daughters and to scrutinize their attachments. The colleges themselves soon instituted policies which discouraged and punished close friendships amongst students. Young women were

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99 N.S.W.A.D.B., op.cit., p.90.
100 Birke, op.cit., p.83.
101 N.S.W.A.D.B., op.cit., p.92.
102 Ibid., p.376; Birke, op.cit., p.82; personal communication with a homosexual friend who in the 1970s volunteered to put himself in the care of notorious Sydney psychiatrist Harry Bailey rather than go to prison. He was given an undisclosed drug treatment.
103 Cited in Weeks, Sexuality and its Discontents, p.150.
104 Faederman, Surpassing the Love of Men, p.325; Faederman, Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers, pp.134-137.
105 Faederman, Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers, p.49.
alerted to the dangers of 'unwise college friendships' and warned they could lead to abnormality and degeneracy. By the end of the 1920s, these had developed into warnings of suicide and insanity.\textsuperscript{107}

Same sex crushes, which had long been considered a normal aspect of girlhood, were now seen as a sign of incipient homosexuality. Parents were advised that such relationships were to be strongly discouraged and, if necessary, help could be sought to adjust their daughters to heterosexuality. By the 1920s, when psychoanalytic thought became widely disseminated, some psychiatrists were advising parents to be wary of their children's love for fear of creating a homosexual. In the 1950s, when the influence of psychiatry reached its peak in the West, parents were again strongly advised to send their daughters to psychiatrists or have them committed to psychiatric institutions if they were prone to same-sex attachments.\textsuperscript{108}

**Self-regulation**

Medical men's warnings about homosexuality inaugurated a regime of surveillance and regulation, particularly of adolescents, by parents, doctors, teachers and peers. The degree to which medical views of homosexuality had been disseminated and naturalised by the 1970s, as well as the effectiveness of surveillance and regulation is illustrated in an experiment cited by Faderman. For a family-life course project, two Californian high school girls behaved as 'romantic friends' would have done a century before - they held hands, sat with their arms around each other and kissed each other on the cheek. This behaviour was interpreted by their peers (of both sexes) as 'lesbian' and the girls found themselves ostracised, subject to name calling and even threatened with violence.\textsuperscript{109}

For Foucault, the most significant yet most insidious form of regulation generated through the 'deployment of sexuality' was the idea that sexuality represented the 'truth' of the self, and could explain


\textsuperscript{108} Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers*, pp.89,133.

\textsuperscript{109} Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men*, p.312.
everything about the person.\textsuperscript{110} Bio-power, working through sexological discourses of the homosexual 'type' of person:

categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize and which others have to recognize in him. It is a form of power that makes individuals subjects.\textsuperscript{111}

By 'subject' Foucault means both the process of identity acquisition, by a conscience or self-knowledge, and the process of subjection, through which identification one is subjected to someone else by control and dependence. According to Foucault, subjectivity 'works' for power in the case of homosexuality when individuals fully identify themselves with the subject of sexology's pathologizing discourses, and take sexologists speculations to be true descriptions of themselves. Individuals are further subjected when, on recognizing their essentially 'diseased' state, they then voluntarily place themselves in the normalizing care of doctors and psychiatrists.

Accounts of lesbians' lives are replete with sickening moments of self-recognition as the subject of pathologizing discourses of homosexuality. Until the moment of revelation of the 'true' nature of their feelings, they had not necessarily seen their relationships or desires as problematic. Recognition of the 'true nature' of their feelings and desires initiated a normalizing operation where intimate relations with other women were scrutinized and female love objects were often renounced. Identification with 'inversion' or lesbianism also left many girls and women with a disabling sense of themselves as dirty, sick, perverted, depraved and probably in need of psychiatric help. Given the sexualization of all intimate relations, women who felt close to other women, even if there was no sexual contact, could conclude that they were sexual deviants. In this climate, 'lesbianism' was not an identification many women welcomed.\textsuperscript{112}

\textsuperscript{110} Foucault, \textit{The History of Sexuality}, pp.43, 69.
The fear of abnormality had an enormous self-regulatory effect. Many women fled into heterosexual marriages. To avoid detection, homosexuals themselves often hid behind 'front' marriages. Some homosexual men and women voluntarily subjected themselves to psychiatric treatment in the hope of changing their sexual orientation. These treatments often did not work, and instead increased the individual's self-hatred and shame. One of the most shameful effects of the stigmatization of homosexuality, and the subsequent need for self-preservation, has been the preparedness of some prominent public figures, themselves homosexual, to publicly denounce homosexuality.\textsuperscript{113}

Self-subjugation in the form of silence, secrecy and self-restraint (referred to today as 'closeting') was a feature of most male and female homosexuals' lives in the face of criminal sanctions, hostility, violence, the threat of social ostracism and the loss of family, friends and even children. A thousand and one petty and significant harassments took their toll on individual homosexual men and women. However, if the elimination of homosexuality was the stated objective of these strategies, then its unintended effects were quite the opposite.

In having 'made up' new types of people, to use Ian Hacking's term,\textsuperscript{114} sexologists provided the conditions of personhood and new 'subject positions' - that is, new ways for people to be. In their zeal to acquaint the public and homosexual people alike with their 'condition', the sexologists inadvertently also 'implanted' the possibility of homosexual relations in the broader community. From the late 19th Century, 'inverts', 'perverts', lesbians and homosexuals began to proliferate and take on a life of their own, individually and collectively.


\textsuperscript{114} Hacking, op.cit. ("Making Up People").
III. RESISTANCE

Resistant subjects

As Jeffrey Weeks has observed: "the history of sexuality is as much a history of avoidance of, or resistance to, the moral code, as of a simple acceptance and internalization".\footnote{Weeks, Sex, Politics and Society, p.15.} Some homosexual women took up the new subject position 'sexual invert' in ways that were entirely negative and disabling, as I indicated in the previous section. Some women in homosexual relationships were familiar with the sexologists' descriptions, but simply rejected them as distortions of their lives and unrepresentative of their own self-perceptions and self-knowledge.\footnote{Faderman, Surpassing the Love of Men, p.322 cites a sociological study of lesbians in the 1920s and 1930s in which many respondents felt Radclyffe Hall's The Well of Loneliness did not accurately portray the way most lesbians lived their lives. The book drew heavily on Ellis's notions of gender inversion. Similarly many prominent lesbian writers and artists at the time also responded negatively to the book. Many lesbians also dismissed as nonsense the idea that they were abnormal or were men trapped women's bodies (Faderman, Surpassing the Love of Men, pp.252,328; Faderman, Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers, pp.111-112).} Undoubtedly, many other women in homosexual relationships were blissfully unaware of sexology, by virtue of their class or race position, and lived their lives outside this power-knowledge regime in a time when that was still possible.\footnote{Terry, op.cit., pp.60-68, in her analysis of a particular medico-scientific study of (mainly black, working class) lesbians in New York in the late 1930s, finds the subjects contesting the interviewing doctor's medicalization of their sexual orientation and resisting any idea of a cure. The women's self-assurance and enthusiasm for sex utterly confounded both the doctors and the sexological verities of the time.} Other women identified with the sexologists categories, seeing in the notion of 'congenital abnormality' an argument for their right to exist and for society to leave them to pursue their unconventional lives. Claiming one couldn't help oneself was preferable to facing accusations of immorality by 'choosing' to wilfully fly in the face of convention. As Faderman notes of congenitalist arguments: "the sexologists had provided (a) ready-made defense of homosexuality".\footnote{Faderman, Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers, p.56.}
conform to the norms of heterosexual femininity. She could be allowed to pursue 'male' interests, such as an education and a career and claim 'masculine' attributes of self-determination, independence and an autonomous, even aggressive, sex drive. She could adopt a male manner and even male dress to press home the issue.\textsuperscript{119}

Drawing on the sexologists, it could also be argued that female 'inversion', linked as it was to the 'superior' masculine qualities of objectivity, capacity for reason, dedication to work and transcendence of normal women's emotionality, fitted such women for leadership roles in the women's movement.\textsuperscript{120} Within some literary circles, women found in Carpenter's more positive views of the 'third sex' a means to positively construct themselves and their relationships with each other.\textsuperscript{121}

Taking up the subject position 'sexual invert' required fitting oneself to the category. This project of remaking the self was not necessarily a straightforward exercise, however. In her discussion of Duc's novel, Martin draws out the difficulties women faced in attempting to negotiate the new identity categories, as well as the costs of that identification. One discussion staged between the women in the novel centred on the question of whether someone who had been previously married could rightfully claim membership of the 'third sex', since that category conceptually excluded the possibility of bisexuality. It seemed the only possible explanation for the previously married woman's behaviour, according to these other women, was that she was 'pseudo' invert or 'pseudo' third-sexer. Of course, this is what the sexologists themselves would have concluded.

This fictional example demonstrates the constraining and exclusionary effects of the new category of 'sexual invert'. Having identified themselves as the subjects of that category, the women were bound to reach conclusions consistent with those of the discourse. They were unable to use the contradictory evidence of bisexuality to challenge


\textsuperscript{120} Martin, 'Extraordinary Homosexuals', pp.106-107.

the sexologists' classificatory schemes. Consequently, the 'pseudo' third-sexer was excluded from their circle.

The category of 'invert' also demanded a high degree of self-discipline. To take up the position of 'sexual invert', at least in Duc's novel, one had to engage in a process of self-stylization that expunged all signs of femininity. What is striking about some of the characters in the novel is how hard they worked at not being the 'second sex' ('women') with all its negative connotations of dependency, weakness, lesser intelligence and so on.\textsuperscript{122} While the sexological discourses could offer a useful and welcome defence of its own subjects, they also defined and fixed their subjects' identities and desires, forcing a behavioural conformation and excluding other possibilities, for example bisexuality.

On the other hand, the characters in Radclyffe Hall's 1928 book, \textit{The Well of Loneliness}, do not engage in any illuminating negotiations of the categories of 'true' and 'false' invert, but rather enacted a by-then stereotypical scenario of female homosexuality. Indeed, Hall drew her inspiration from Ellis's \textit{Sexual Inversion}, and Ellis wrote the preface of the book.\textsuperscript{123} Hall's book, and its stereotypes of 'true' and 'false' inversion provided a model for 'butch' and 'femme' lesbian self-stylization which would endure for many decades.

\textit{The Well of Loneliness, Are These Women?} and other novels of the time clearly indicate the presence of thriving subcultures organised around the new identity categories. The gradual dissemination of sexological and medical knowledge of homosexuality throughout society had created a consciousness of like people that one could seek out. From the 1890s to the 1920s, homosexual communities formed in the large cities of Britain, continental Europe, Russia, the United States and Australia. Communities of homosexual men and women endured through the dark years of the 1930s and were revitalized in the war years and after. This at the same time that the demonized figure of the lesbian was again deployed to discipline women into domesticity.\textsuperscript{124} The McCarthyist

\textsuperscript{122} Martin, \textit{Extraordinary Homosexuals}, pp.113-115.


witch-hunts of the 1950s also served to consolidate homosexual subcultures through the urgent need to band together for self-protection and support. This process of community formation, an unanticipated effect of normalizing power, also provided a base for homosexual activism.

The object of normalizing power working through discourses of sexology is for individuals of homosexual inclination to take 'sexual inversion' or 'uranianism' to be the mark of who they truly are, as in the case of the actual and fictional women above. Yet the examples above also show how that identification could be used as a base from which to claim rights to traditional masculine privileges of an education, a career and political representation, and to create a life outside the norms of social and sexual convention. This twofold effect of discourses of sexology, as an instrument and effect of power, but also "a hindrance, a stumbling-block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy", is a feature of what Foucault called the 'tactical polyvalence of discourses'. By this phrase Foucault meant that the tactical function of discourse is neither uniform nor stable vis-à-vis the (normalizing) object of power. Discourses are prone to 'reversal', as in the cases above, such that

homosexuality began to speak in its own behalf, to demand that its legitimacy or 'naturality' be acknowledged, often in the same vocabulary, using the same categories by which it was medically disqualified.

In the next section, I look at how a 'reverse discourse' of homosexuality underpinned homosexuals' initial attempts at organized resistance to punitive regulation.

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125 Weeks, Coming Out, pp.87-88; Faderman, Surpassing the Love of Men, p.250; Faderman, Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers, passim; Adam, op.cit., pp.11-13,23,30,43,52; Rubin, 'Thinking Sex', p.286.


127 ibid., p.101.
Movements of resistance

Nineteenth century sexology, through producing an awareness of belonging to a category of person, the 'homosexual', inadvertently provided the conditions of possibility for collective identity and organized resistance to regimes of punitive regulation. German organizations such as The Scientific-Humanitarian Committee and the Institute of Sex Research, established by Magnus Hirschfeld in 1897 and 1919 respectively, led the way in putting the scientific 'facts' about the 'third sex' before the public and to politicians. Deploying a strategy of 'reverse discourse', these organizations argued that homosexuality was a harmless congenital aberration and that legal sanctions were therefore inappropriate.\textsuperscript{128}

Inspired by the German movement, similar organizations were constituted on the Continent, in Britain and the U.S. The British Society for the Study of Sex Psychology was established in 1914, with Edward Carpenter its first President. The Chicago-based Society for Human Rights was founded in 1924. The homophile movement soon became internationalized. Following the second International Congress for Sex Reform in 1928, the World League for Sexual Reform was established.\textsuperscript{129} None of these organizations achieved their goal of law reform, however, nor did they survive the forces unleashed by Nazism and Stalinism, or the events of World War II.

The fortunes of the sex reform movements began to decline in the late 1920s. The Society for Human Rights was closed down by police and in Europe and the U.S. censorship of books, journals and films had begun. Criminal penalties for homosexuality, which had been abolished in post-revolutionary Russia, were reimposed by Stalin in 1934. In the 1928 German election campaign, the Nazi party signalled its hostility to homosexuality, although several high-ranking party officials were known homosexuals. On seizing power in 1933, the Nazis immediately initiated a brutal repression of homosexuality, closing down bars, organizations and journals, and purging its own ranks. The leaders of the Institute for Sex Research were arrested and imprisoned, and some sent to


\textsuperscript{129} Adam, op.cit., pp.40,46; Weeks, \textit{Coming Out}, pp.128,131-141.
concentration camps along with thousands of other homosexuals. The Institute building itself was sacked and its papers and library publicly burnt. Many other leaders of homophile organizations and the women's movement fled Germany.  

Immediately following the war, homophile movements again began to emerge, particularly in Scandinavia. Repression of homosexuality in Germany continued after the war, and homosexual organizations would not begin to re-form there until the 1970s. In 1951, at the height of McCarthyism in the U.S., the (male homosexual) Mattachine Society established itself and, in 1953, even held a convention. The U.S. lesbian organization, the Daughters of Bilitis, followed in 1955 and held their first convention in 1960. A mixed-sex homophile group, One Inc. also formed in the 1950s. The Daughters of Bilitis and The Mattachine Society, however, were amongst the 'dissident' groups infiltrated by the F.B.I. and C.I.A. in the 1950s. The lesbian organizations, the Minorities Research Group and Kenric, were founded in Britain in 1963 and 1965 respectively. In 1958, following the recommendation by the Wolfenden Committee for decriminalization (see Chapter Two), the Homosexual Law Reform Society was founded. Other smaller law reform organizations soon followed.

The new post-war homophile organization retained the strategy of 'reverse discourse', using sympathetic doctors and psychiatrists to argue their case for law reform, and for social tolerance and acceptance. The tactics employed were education-oriented and non-confrontational: lobbying politicians, holding public lectures, participating in and publishing research in the belief that reason and the truth would prevail. The Daughters of Bilitis was so concerned with creating a positive public image that they disavowed cross dressing, working-class 'butch' lesbians and instead advocated socially acceptable (i.e. feminine) modes of behaviour and dress. In the climate of the times, homophile organizations

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130 Adam, op.cit., pp.53-56; Weeks, Coming Out, pp.141-143.

expected homosexual men and women to 'adjust' and assimilate to society.\textsuperscript{132}

There is a paradox inherent in the strategy of 'reverse discourse' which continues to this day. In taking up the discourse and categories which had given them life, and claiming through them the right to exist and, for men, the need for law reform, homosexuals could not develop a critique of sexology or scientific authority. Indeed, many of these authorities addressed meetings of homophile organizations, where they would convey to the audience the results of the latest research on their 'condition'.\textsuperscript{133} Articles published in these organizations' journals propounded the established wisdom of doctors and psychiatrists on homosexuality. Some of these doctors and psychiatrists, Hirschfeld for example, were also, in the early days, themselves leaders of homophile organizations. The conditions were not yet ripe for a challenge to scientific authority on the question of homosexual 'pathology'. By the late 1960s, however, this tradition of homosexual organizing had been radically overturned. But it was from these organizations and the established homosexual communities that gay liberation would emerge.

The possibility of taking lesbianism to be a personal identity is, as I have shown in this Chapter, an effect of nineteenth century sexological discourses. Similarly, the conception of the lesbian as 'not-woman', expressed in the opening quote of this chapter, can be shown to be an effect of attempts to stabilize traditional relations between the sexes, through recourse to categories of 'natural' men and women. The contemporary lesbian feminist understanding of lesbianism as gender transgression can be traced to the notion of gender 'inversion', to which categories nineteenth century sexologists consigned gender aberrant behaviours.

The 'deployment of sexuality' consolidated what to Foucault were previously 'scattered', multiple forms of sexual behaviour into two major stabilized and manageable forms and practices: 'normal' hetero- and 'abnormal' homo- sexuality. The normalizing operations of bio-power,


\textsuperscript{133} S. Phelan, \textit{Identity Politics. Lesbian Feminism and the Limits of Community}, Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1988, pp.30-31, reports that homophile organizations also sought out members of the psychiatric establishment to serve on their boards of directors.
through which all intimate relations were sexualized and same-sex relations refigured as arising from a disposition within a certain type of (pathologized) person, also made possible a mass movement of homosexuals.

With this historical background in mind, in the next chapter I identify the social, political and discursive conditions of the mid-twentieth century which enabled the transformation of homophile assimilationism into gay liberation.
CHAPTER TWO

SEXUAL POLITICS IN THE 1960s: FEMINISM AND GAY LIBERATION

The 'Stonewall rebellion' in June 1969 is widely seen by historians of homosexuality as the crystallizing event in the formation of the contemporary gay and lesbian movements. During a routine police raid on the Stonewall Inn, a homosexual bar in New York's Greenwich Village, patrons and onlookers congregated outside began hurling bottles, cobblestones and other objects at police. Clashes between homosexuals and police erupted again over the following nights. During that period, the slogan 'support gay power' appeared on the boarded-up windows of the Stonewall Inn. The Stonewall riots signalled a new willingness of homosexuals to resist state-sponsored harassment with confrontation and direct action. The Gay Liberation Front formed in New York soon after the riots and, within a year, hundreds of gay and lesbian organizations and publications had appeared in the U.S. Inspired by the emerging U.S. movement, within two years of Stonewall, gay and lesbian groups were established in major cities in Canada, Australia and Western Europe. For homosexuals, "the Stonewall Rebellion was the shot heard round the world".

Established homosexual communities and organizations were one of the preconditions for the emergence of gay liberation. As John D'Emilio has observed, "a massive, grass-roots liberation movement could form almost overnight precisely because communities of lesbians and gay men existed". But this was only one of a number of elements which combined to form the unique historical formation known as gay liberation, and for which the Stonewall riots acted as a catalyst. This chapter, therefore, is concerned with identifying the social, political and discursive conditions of emergence of the contemporary gay and lesbian

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4 D'Emilio, 'Capitalism and Gay Identity', p.147.
movements. Some of the problems generated by the discourses of gay liberation, particularly their deployment of a 'repressive hypothesis' of sexuality, are highlighted as a prelude to a more detailed analysis of lesbian feminism in Chapter 3.

I. THE CONDITIONS OF EMERGENCE OF GAY LIBERATION

The modern gay and lesbian movements emerged out of what Jeffrey Weeks characterizes as a "particular unstable conjunction of social and political elements which we can best characterise as the 'permissive moment'" in advanced capitalist societies, a moment Weeks identifies as covering a period from the late 1950s through to the mid 1970s. It was a moment which saw significant shifts in the modes of regulating sexuality as traditional moral authority, particularly the church, declined and the law retreated from the private realm. A new concern over appropriate modes of regulating sexual behaviour and an unprecedented challenge to the authority of the medical and psychiatric professions saw dramatic shifts take place in the understanding of homosexuality. These factors, along with the emergence of 'sexual liberation' and the New Left, counter-cultural and feminist movements, provided the social, political and discursive conditions of emergence of politicized homosexual identities and the gay liberation movement.⁶

Law Reform

The resurgence of hostility towards homosexuals during the Cold War era of the 1950s resulted in an increased number of prosecutions for homosexual offences. In Britain, at least, this produced a growing concern about the appropriateness of the law as a means of regulating homosexuality. Several highly publicized prosecutions of prominent men had highlighted the fundamental contradiction between the law on homosexuality and liberal democratic principles, particularly the right to privacy. The conflicting formulation of homosexuality as both an illness and a crime prompted moves to resolve its status. Law reform advocates,

⁵ Weeks, Sexuality and its Discontents, pp.20-21.
supported by some Members of Parliament, eventually secured an inquiry on the law and judicial practice relating to homosexual offences. The Wolfenden Committee, as the inquiry was known, was to report on what changes to the law, if any, were desirable.\(^7\)

The Report of the Wolfenden Committee, released in 1957, was significant in establishing the 'permissive moment's' principle of the right to sexual privacy. Arguing that the purpose of the law was not to impose a particular pattern of moral behaviour, but rather to uphold public order and decency, the Wolfenden Committee recommended the decriminalization of homosexual acts between consenting adults (21 years and over) in private. At the same time, it recommended that penalties for public sex (for example, in public lavatories), soliciting and importuning be increased. The Committee, however, did not challenge the medical model of homosexuality and recommended that hormone treatment should be made available to those prisoners who requested it. The Report also recommended that further research into the aetiology and treatment of homosexuality should be undertaken.\(^8\)

The British government's unwillingness to implement the recommendations of the Wolfenden Committee's Report led to the formation of the Homosexual Law Reform Society in 1958. Supported by intellectuals and liberals within the church and in the medical and legal professions, the Society exerted pressure on the government to implement the Wolfenden recommendations. After a long campaign, their efforts paid off with the passing of the Sexual Offences Act in 1967, which decriminalized sexual activity between consenting adult males homosexuals in private in England and Wales. In the aftermath of the English and Welsh law reform, the Scottish Minorities Group was established in 1969 to campaign for the decriminalization of homosexual activity in Scotland. In the same year the Campaign for Homosexual Equality (C.H.E.) formed from one of the smaller English law reform movements, its main concern being to maintain the momentum for law reform.\(^9\)


\(^8\) Weeks, *Coming Out*, pp.165-166.

In those countries where individual states rather than national
governments have jurisdiction over the regulation of sexual behaviour, as
in the U.S. and Australia, law reform before the advent of gay liberation
was limited. Illinois in 1961 became the first American state to
decriminalize sexual activity between consenting adult male
homosexuals in private.10 A New South Wales government inquiry (the
Trethewan Committee), convened to examine the cause and treatment of
homosexuality, reached similar conclusions and formulated similar
recommendations to those of Wolfenden. The Report of the Committee,
completed in 1963, was, however, suppressed and its recommendations
ignored.11 In 1969 the Australian Capital Territory Law Reform Society
was established with the aim of decriminalizing male homosexual
behaviour in the A.C.T., a goal achieved in 1976.12 In South Australia,
limited law reform, the first in Australia, had been passed four years
earlier.13

Homosexual law reforms at the time were not seen to have any wider
implication than offsetting the undesirable effects of criminalization (for
example, blackmail). But decriminalization was indeed the ‘thin end of the
wedge’, as the anti-law reformists had feared. Increasing numbers of
convictions for public sexual encounters in the wake of the 1967 British
reforms, inequitable age of consent laws, discrimination against
homosexuals and prosecutions of magazines which ran contact
advertisements (advertisements in which homosexuals indicated their
wish to meet others), encouraged ongoing homosexual activism. Law
reform did not therefore pacify homosexuals. Rather, it opened up a
political space for the further pursuit of civil rights.14

10 Adam, op.cit., p.75.
11 Wother spoon, City of the Plain, pp.119-120; Johnston and Johnston, op.cit., pp.94-95.
12 Wother spoon, City of the Plain, p.163; Johnston and Johnston, op.cit., p.95; N.S.W.A.D.B., op.cit., p.344.
13 N.S.W.A.D.B., op.cit., p.344; Australian Lesbian and Gay Archives, Homosexual Law Reform in Australia,
Parkville Vic., 1983. This is a series of monographs, state by state.
14 Weeks, Coming Out, p.175; Weeks, Sex, Politics and Society, pp.268,274-275. See also F. Mort, ‘Sexuality:
Regulation and Contestation’, in V. Beechey and J. Donald (eds), Subjectivity and Social Relations, Milton
New developments in sexology

At the same time that legal regulation of male homosexuality was reordered around public policing and private license, shifts in thinking within some sectors of the regulating professions were problematizing medical discourses on homosexuality. The Kinsey Institute’s reports, *Sexual Behaviour in the Human Male* (1948) and *Sexual Behaviour in the Human Female* (1953), established that people engaged in a wider variety of sexual experiences than had been previously thought. In particular, Kinsey’s study revealed that 37% of his male sample had experienced same-sex contact to orgasm. It could hardly then be claimed that over a third of the adult male population in the U.S. was suffering from a personality disorder. For Weeks, the significance of the Kinsey reports for the developing liberal sexual mores of the 1960s was that, even as Kinsey himself subscribed to the medical model of homosexuality, his research data undermined the idea of a 'normal' sexuality conferred by nature.¹⁵

The 1950s and 1960s saw an explosion of interest in less orthodox sexualities and social 'deviation' in general. Weeks reports a plethora of sociological studies in Britain which began with the 'problem' of social deviance and sought to define the characteristics and lifestyles of these 'problem groups'. The objective of these studies was to make recommendations as to the appropriate social and political intervention in the problem. In the case of homosexuals, the studies instead more often than not challenged the predominant view of the homosexual as a pathological personality type. Conclusions to these studies asserted that, except for their sexual behaviour, homosexuals were 'normal' and well-adjusted individuals.¹⁶

Psychologists in the 1950s and 1960s, applying a battery of personality tests to their 'deviant' subjects, produced inconclusive and conflicting findings on the presumed family aetiology of homosexuality.

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and disordered personality of homosexuals. Sympathetic researchers, encouraged by individual homosexuals and homophile organizations, demonstrated that homosexuality did not necessarily signify pathology. Using standard psychological tests, Evelyn Hooker's landmark 1957 study arrived at such a conclusion and recommended decriminalization of homosexuality and the instituting of anti-discrimination provisions in employment. Some professional associations began to support similar reforms. The American Sociological Association passed a no-discrimination resolution in 1969 and, in 1970/71, the National Association for Mental Health declared that homosexuality did not constitute a mental or emotional illness and called for its decriminalization.

Shifts in psychiatric discourses of homosexuality in the 1960s can be located in the context of a growing concern about the political function of psychiatry by some of its practitioners. The 'anti-psychiatry' movement, led by Thomas Szasz in the U.S. and R. D. Laing in Britain, argued that psychiatry, in controlling social deviance through labelling as 'sick' and then 'treating' those who did not conform to social norms, constituted a form of oppression. For the radical psychiatrists, psychiatry was nothing more than a 'brainwashing' technique which conditioned people to socially-defined 'normal' behaviour. This state of conditioned normalcy was itself, to the anti-psychiatrists, alienated and unhealthy.

While the views of these radical psychiatrists, social scientists and psychologists were a minority opinion at the time, by the late 1960s, and against the official position of their professional associations, the majority of health professionals, along with homophile organizations, had abandoned the medical model of homosexuality.

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17 N.S.W.A.D.B., op.cit., pp.77-81; Weeks, Sex, Politics and Society, p.283. Martin and Lyon, op.cit., pp.266-269, discuss the variable outcomes of research that Daughters of Bilitis was involved in.
19 Adam, op.cit., p.88; N.S.W.A.D.B., op.cit., p.108; Martin and Lyon's account, (op.cit, p.271) reveals the behind-the-scenes work by homophile organizations like Daughters of Bilitis in these decisions.
21 Martin and Lyon, op.cit., pp.269-270; Adam, op.cit., p.79.
As a contributing factor to the emergence of gay liberation, the challenge to medical science's hegemonic determinations on homosexuality by emergent 'progressive' sociological, sexological and psychological discourses cannot be overestimated. Through 'anti-psychiatry' in particular, homosexuals could constitute themselves as a 'persecuted' group, 'oppressed' by society's demand that everyone conform to the heterosexual norm. Any mental illness they suffered (if any) was now seen to be caused by social stress and prejudice. In this new discursive regime, society itself was at fault, not the individual homosexual. Homosexuality was becoming less a medical problem and more a political issue.

The impact of this new understanding of homosexuality on the self-perception of homosexuals was life-changing and radicalizing. No longer seeing themselves as 'sick', but rather 'oppressed', homosexuals began to organize politically. The established homophile organizations shifted the focus of their activity from public education and pleas for tolerance to demands for civil rights. But by the time of the Stonewall riots, civil rights activism was set to transform into a mass mobilization of homosexuals demanding sexual and social liberation.22

Sexual liberation

One of the most critical elements in the emergence of gay liberation was that emblem of the 'permissive moment', 'sexual liberation'. Sexual liberation itself emerged from several other social conditions of the 1960s: an increasing public discourse on sexual matters encouraged by liberal reforms in censorship laws; a decline in the traditional moral authority of the church; a loosening up of sexual mores, especially for women in the context of new contraceptive technology ('the pill') and, in Britain, abortion law reform.23 Together these elements produced an explosion of sex-talk and sexual activity which characterized liberal circles in the 1960s.

23 Weeks, Sex, Politics and Society, pp.258-264.
New representational spaces for homosexuality opened up in the 1960s as censorship of the theatre, films and publications was gradually relaxed. Besides censorship law reform in Britain in the late 1960s, in 1961 the U.S. Motion Picture Production Code, which had prohibited explicit reference to homosexuality in films since the 1930s, was revised. This revision was in response to pressure from the producers of two Hollywood films which broke the taboo on homosexuality on screen - *Advise and Consent* and a new version of *The Children's Hour* (previously *These Three*) that was true to Lillian Hellman's original play.\(^{24}\) The Motion Picture Association of America justified their decision to revise the Code on the following grounds: "In keeping with the culture, the mores and the values of our time, homosexuality and other sexual aberrations may now be treated with care, discretion and restraint".\(^{25}\)

While homosexuality could ostensibly now be openly represented and talked about in American films, the statement above indicates the general tenor of films with explicit homosexual themes at the time. During the 1960s, according to Russo,\(^{26}\) the dominant representations of homosexuals perpetuated traditional stereotypes of homosexuals as predatory, pathological and dangerous, and the homosexual person as unhappy, racked by fear and prone to self-destruction. Threatened by exposure of their 'dirty secret', homosexuals in films of the 1960s most often ended up dying at their own or somebody else's hand. One or two films pleaded for tolerance, however. The controversial 1961 British film *Victim* elicited sympathy and acceptance for the homosexual characters, who were subject to blackmail and sometimes killed themselves in the face of threats of exposure. The film endorsed the Wolfenden recommendations and contributed to a developing climate of public opinion for law reform.\(^{27}\)

A more favourable public opinion on homosexuality was also encouraged by a developing sexual liberalization in the mass media. In the early 1960s, mainstream magazines like *Time* in the U.S. and *The

\(^{24}\) Russo, op.cit., p.33.

\(^{25}\) Ibid., p.121. Ironically, in 1973 the Gay Activists Alliance would formulate its own Code for the television and motion picture industry, providing guidelines for the fair and reasonable representation of lesbians and gays (pp.220-221).

\(^{26}\) Ibid., pp.123,153-154,162.

\(^{27}\) Ibid., p.128; Weeks, *Coming Out*, p.174.
Bulletin in Australia were reporting on the growing confidence of the homosexual subculture and favourably reporting on conferences of homophile organizations. There was increasing public debate on the question of whether homosexuality was an abnormality or just a harmless sexual variation. By the 1970s, homosexual women and men were appearing as characters in television 'soaps', generally receiving sympathetic treatment and gradually less subject to stereotypical representation. At the same time, however, coverage of homosexual issues in the press was more erratic and sometimes condemnatory. But the previous public consensus on homosexuality was breaking down under the combined weight of sexual liberation and changing attitudes to homosexuality, as demonstrated by some mainstream magazines' claims that fear of lesbian sex was a sign of repression.

Sexual liberation's engagement with the emerging New Left was effected through Freudo-Marxist discourse, particularly that of Wilhelm Reich and Herbert Marcuse. Reich, a psychoanalyst, had been involved in the Austrian and German Communist Parties and the sex reform movement of the 1920s and 1930s. Reich and his Marxist-inspired Sexpol movement and clinics were victims of the Nazi terror, as were Marcuse, Erich Fromm and other members of the Frankfurt School. These individuals were amongst the European intellectuals who relocated to the United States in the 1930s and 1940s. There, they were to influence profoundly the form taken by the American New Left in the 1960s. Here I can only give a very brief exposition of the ideas of most significance to the New Left and gay liberation movements.

For Reich, repression of libido and genital sexuality lay at the root of neurosis and ill health. Sexual repression, to Reich, was a characteristic of bourgeois society and capitalist economies, and sexual repression lay at the heart of social oppression and the acceptance of authority. In

28 Wotherspoon, City of the Plain, pp.128-129; Martin and Lyon, op.cit., p.253.
29 Weeks, Coming Out, p.228; Wotherspoon, City of the Plain, pp.186-187; N.S.W.A.D.B., op.cit., pp.222-223; 236-238.
31 Fedeman, Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers, pp.201-203.
Reich's scheme, individuals in capitalist societies evince a repressed character structure. This character structure is inculcated in children through the authoritarian patriarchal family. According to Reich, when such a character structure is the normal condition of a society, mass neurosis in the form of fascism is produced. For Reich, the 'cure' for individual and collective neurosis was the restoration of 'orgiastic potency', the capacity for full sexual gratification. Sexual liberation was therefore implicated in the socialist revolution. Reich believed a natural spontaneity (social and sexual) would emerge once repressive social institutions were destroyed. A free sexuality was thus, to Reich, the basis for a better (socialist) society.33

Reich insisted that orgiastic potency could only be achieved in heterosexual intercourse, a view disputed by Marcuse. Marcuse instead posited that sexuality freed from repression took a pre-cultural/pre-capitalist (pre-Oedipal) form - that is, a 'polymorphous perversity'. Marcuse claimed that the sexual 'perversions' in fact represented a rebellion against the hegemony of procreative, genital sexuality. Accordingly, he promoted the revolutionary potential of 'perversion' in its polymorphous (or at least bi-sexual) form. Marcuse, however, did not endorse exclusive homosexuality. To him, this was as much a form of repressive sexuality as exclusive heterosexuality. Nevertheless, his ideas were extremely influential in the early writings of gay liberation.34

For gay and lesbian theorists of the 1960s and 1970s, sexual liberation was realized in 'coming out'. In coming out, one acknowledged one's homosexuality to oneself, revealed oneself as a homosexual to other homosexuals and declared one's homosexuality to everyone and anyone. What homosexuals came out of was the 'closet', a metaphor for the cultural invisibility of homosexuality and of actual homosexuals who feared the consequences of exposure. The closet, then, represented the condition of homosexuals' lives before gay liberation - a space of confinement and secrecy which also concealed and protected them. What homosexuals came out to was both a liberating self-revelation - the recognition of one's 'true identity' as a homosexual (which may have been previously denied) - and a space of freedom where one could

34 Ibid., pp.165-166, Altman, Homosexual, p.56; Abbott and Love, op.cit., pp.188-189.
openly and positively express one's homosexual self. The discourses of sexual liberation, in enabling the open avowal of one's homosexuality through 'coming out', were therefore critical to the emergence and development of the gay liberation movement.

Destabilization of traditional authority

The 'permissive moment' marked a destabilization of traditional moral and political authority. The decreasing relevance of religion to many people, along with liberal law reforms in areas of censorship, homosexuality, divorce and abortion, together with the changing economic role of women, worked to undermine the church's traditional moral authority. With liberals within some churches supporting homosexual and other law reform, the churches themselves became increasingly divided and disunified. Under pressure from within and from homophile organizations, the churches were forced to reconsider their traditionally hostile position on homosexuality. Homosexuals within the more conservative churches formed caucuses and demanded they take a more tolerant stance on homosexuality. The more liberal churches responded by supporting law reform without necessarily endorsing full acceptance of homosexual relations. In other cases, resistance to a more tolerant position was such that open homosexuals were forced out of or chose to leave the church. These circumstances led, in 1968, to the founding of the openly homosexual church, the Metropolitan Community Church, in Los Angeles. The M.C.C. soon had congregations around the world.

While liberalization of the churches contributed to the 'permissive' moment's climate of greater tolerance of homosexuality, religious authority remained marginal to gay and lesbian concerns. A more important contributing factor in the emergence of gay liberation in the 1960s was the growing social unrest evidenced in the emergence of the


'counter-culture' movement, students' movements, the increased militancy of black activism and the emergence of the New Left and women's liberation movements. The 1968 student revolt and general strike in Paris became emblematic of the social turmoil and challenge to the old order going on in advanced capitalist societies at the time. In the U.S. and Australia, the Vietnam war provided one of the most powerful rallying points for rebellion against, and an unprecedented public questioning of, political authority. To understand the significance of the general social unrest of the 1960s to both the emergence of gay liberation and the form it subsequently took, it is necessary to explore the New Left and liberation movements in more detail.

**Liberation movements: The New Left and Black Power**

The liberation movements of the 1960s, notably the black civil rights and New Left movements in the U.S., and struggles against colonialism in Algeria and Vietnam abroad, provided the emerging women's, lesbian and gay liberation movements with their formative concepts, theories and political strategies. Many gay and women's liberationists cut their political teeth in civil rights and New Left organizations in the 1960s, most notably the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (S.N.C.C.) and Students for a Democratic Society (S.D.S.). The S.N.C.C., founded in 1960, was a black student organisation formed to support the black civil rights movement which had emerged in the southern American states during the 1950s. S.N.C.C. was particularly involved in black voter registration campaigns, bringing in white students from the northern states to help in the massive registration campaign leading up to the 1964 presidential election. S.D.S., also formed in 1960, was a Marxist-inspired student organization committed to building a new, more democratic society from the ground up. The task began with an attempt to organize a grass-roots

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37 The counter-cultural movement, in promoting sexual experimentation, rejecting authority and the lifestyle and values of the dominant culture, would provide the early gay liberation movement with a certain amount of its style, language and way of life. See Weeks, *Coming Out*, pp.167-186,190,194,223-204; Altman, *Homosexual*, pp.144-147,172. Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers*, p.263, also reports a high incidence of experimentation with lesbianism within the hippie milieu which she believes helped swell the ranks of lesbians in the 1970s.

38 *Weeks, Sex, Politics and Society*, p.276; Adam, op.cit., p.80.

39 *Wotherspoon, City of the Plain*, pp.140-142; Adam, op.cit., pp.75-76,78,80.
movement of the (mainly black) urban poor. Later, the S.D.S. became primarily an anti-war, anti-conscription movement.\textsuperscript{40}

What set the New Left apart from the 'old' Left was its attention to the everyday and personal dimensions of power and inequality. While the 'old' left was preoccupied with state apparatuses and the economic exploitation of workers, the New Left was inspired by the radical psychiatrists and the radical therapy movement, the Freudo-Marxist political analyses of Reich, Marcuse and Frantz Fanon, and the writings of Antonio Gramsci and Louis Althusser. The connections made in these writings between personal consciousness, everyday life and political domination, along with a concern to overcome a perceived alienation from self produced by capitalism, led to the New Left's call to re-integrate the personal and the political.\textsuperscript{41}

'The personal is political, the political is personal' was a catch-cry of the New Left and, later, radical feminism and gay liberation. 'The personal is political' referred to the politicization of what were previously understood as 'private' concerns. Marriage and the family and structures of personal and sexual relations were now understood to be implicated in political regimes and analyzed accordingly. Conversely, 'the political is personal' meant one's personal life and behaviour was open to scrutiny, judgement and correction in accordance with revolutionary political principles. As I show in later chapters, for radical feminists and gay liberationists in particular, a commitment to 'the political is personal' would work to focus attention on the individual as a site of political transformation.\textsuperscript{42}

As the 1960s progressed, black, student and anti-war groups became more militant and confrontational. In the U.S., students and the Civil Guard clashed on university campuses. Uprisings occurred in black urban ghettos. From within the S.N.C.C., a movement of black nationalism ('Black Power') emerged promoting black community self-organization and black self-determination. White radicals now found


\textsuperscript{42} Echols, op.cit., pp.ix-x,16-17,28-29; Weeks, \textit{Coming Out}, p.236.
themselves no longer welcome in the black movement, hence the S.D.S.'s shift of focus to the anti-war, anti-conscription effort. Black Power found its most extreme expression in the Black Panthers, whose advocacy of urban guerrilla warfare, and the subsequent deaths of its members in police shoot-outs and imprisonment of its leaders, led to its heroic status amongst the most radical white groups. A new black revolutionary discourse, generated through Marxism and national liberation movements abroad, overturned the modest liberal goals of black integration and equal rights, at least for the younger generation and the more radical black organizations.\textsuperscript{43}

These political developments encouraged the formation of new, more activist homosexual groups. Homosexual caucuses, for example, the Student Homophile League, formed within the student activist organizations. As well, the older homophile organizations, having adopted the rhetoric and strategies of the 1950s black civil rights movement, were, by the early 1960s, engaging in non-violent direct action to bring attention to homosexuals' plight. Activists picketed induction centres, protesting against the military's treatment of homosexuals. Homosexual men and women demonstrated outside the White House and the Pentagon demanding civil rights and an end to discrimination in public service employment. Medical and psychiatric conferences were picketed by protesters outside while inside homosexuals spoke out against those professions.\textsuperscript{44}

By 1968, the increased militancy of the Left was further radicalizing homophile organizations. 'The personal is political' brought into question the homophile movement's modest goal of the right to sexual privacy. The old leadership often found itself swept aside by a new generation of homosexuals mobilized by their new self-understanding as politically oppressed. This dramatic shift in homophile politics was signified by the 1968 North American Conference of Homophile Organizations's (N.A.C.H.O.) formal adoption of the slogan 'gay is good', following the example of Black Power's slogan 'black is beautiful'.\textsuperscript{45}

\textsuperscript{43} Adam, op.cit., pp.76,78,80,82; Echols, op.cit., pp.36-37,126-127.

\textsuperscript{44} Adam, op.cit., pp.75-76,78-79,82,87; Faderman, Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers, pp.191-193; Weeks, Coming Out, p.188; Altman, Homosexual, pp.105-104.

\textsuperscript{45} Weeks, Coming Out, p.190; Adam, op.cit., p.79. According to Weeks, the term 'gay' had been in circulation in the homosexual community since the 1950s.
Liberation movements: radical feminism

Women played a crucial role in the political work of the civil rights, students' and New Left movements. Women's absence from decision-making and leadership roles, however, was a testament to the lack of recognition of their contribution and their low status within those organizations. Women often functioned as the 'ladies auxiliary of the revolution': providing refreshments at meetings, caring for the 'frontline troops' (presumed male, although many women were also at the 'front') and relegated to office work. The status that was conferred on them was by virtue of whichever male revolutionary they were married to or were sleeping with at the time. Accordingly, many women felt excluded and sexually exploited by New Left men.46

The growing gap between the New Left's rhetoric of equality and women's subordinate position within the various organizations soon led to tensions within the movement. In 1964, white women in the S.N.C.C. developed a position paper on sexual inequality in the organization. The paper, presented at a national meeting of the S.N.C.C., cited cases of sexual discrimination in the organization, likened male supremacy to racial supremacy and criticized women's exclusion from decision-making roles. S.N.C.C. leader Stokely Carmichael's infamous response, that "the position of women in S.N.C.C. is prone",47 only served to escalate tensions. Within the S.D.S., women raised the issue of the sexual division of labour within the organization at a 1965 national conference. The response by a number of S.D.S. men was so hostile that the women resolved to form a women-only workshop to discuss the problem. The issue was overshadowed for a period as the movement was convulsed by the expulsion of whites from the black civil rights movement and by the emergence of Black Power. By the time women's role in the New Left re-emerged as an issue within S.D.S. in 1967, Black Power had provided the women with a ready-made model for an analysis of their own

47 Echols, op.cit., p.31.
oppression and an argument for the necessity to organize around their own struggle.\textsuperscript{48}

Taking up Black Power’s call for people to organize on their own behalf to fight their own oppression, New Left women broke with the standard Marxist analysis that the liberation of blacks and women would follow the liberation of the labouring people. New Left women were becoming increasingly sceptical of this promise in light of the experience of the Cuban revolution some years earlier. Cuban women revolutionaries, who had fought alongside the men, soon after found themselves relegated to domestic duties and child rearing. Accordingly, S.D.S.’s women’s caucus formulated a ‘manifesto’, containing a catalogue of grievances and promoting a dual strategy of women’s liberation \textit{alongside} class revolution. Although the manifesto’s programme for policy and organizational reform was adopted at the 1967 national conference, the reaction by men was even more hostile than in 1965.\textsuperscript{49}

Tensions between S.D.S. men and women only increased at subsequent conferences, pushing the women to adopt Black Power’s de-integration policy. Separating the feminist struggle from the class struggle, while still maintaining connections to the left, many independent women’s groups began forming from the S.D.S. Women from outside the New Left began to join these groups. Two factions subsequently emerged: the ‘politicos’ and the ‘feminists’. The politicos viewed male domination as an epiphenomenon of capitalism to which a socialist revolution would bring an end. The feminists argued that male domination constituted the original form of domination from which class and race oppression flowed. For the feminists, a \textit{women’s} revolution would bring liberation to all. In 1968, the feminist faction made a complete break with the Left and formed the first autonomous radical feminist groups. The founders of those groups, Shulamith Firestone (Redstockings, New York Radical Feminists), Ti-Grace Atkinson (The Feminists) and Anne Koedt (New York Radical Feminists) would soon


produce some of the classic early works of radical feminist theory. The women who stayed in the Left either maintained the 'politic' position or began to articulate a socialist feminism, a political project committed to organizing women simultaneously around gender and class oppression.50

The significance of radical feminism to gay liberation lay in its development of a critique of 'sex roles' and the family which, when inflected through Marcuse, could be turned to an account of homosexual oppression. 'Sexism', a concept analogous to racism, signified to feminists the particular oppression of women. When homosexual oppression was figured as a subsidiary effect of the oppression of women through radical feminism's critique of sex roles, 'sexism' would initially also become a central explanatory device for homosexual oppression. Seeing sexism as the force behind both male supremacy and heterosexual chauvinism, many gay liberationists were also feminists and took the women's liberation movement to be their natural ally.51

Shifts in the modes of regulating homosexuality and the contestation of the meaning of homosexuality within the regulating professions, along with 'sexual liberation', the 'counter-culture' movement and political movements such as Black power, the New Left and radical feminism constituted the major social, political and discursive conditions of emergence of gay liberation in the United States in the late 1960s. The country's immediate past history of black civil rights claims had established the principle of the inalienable rights of minorities. The example of black power inspired homosexuals to determine their own lives and organize on their own behalf without the assistance of the (increasingly discredited) medical and psychiatric profession and the


51 Some gay liberationists went further, embracing radical feminism's proposition that women's oppression was the primary form of oppression (see Chapter 3). To these 'effeminists', homosexual liberation was subsidiary to women's liberation and they argued that gay liberation should be subsumed by radical feminism. Adam, op.cit., p.99; Weeks, Coming Out, pp.187-188,191,196,203; Jeffrey's, Anticlimax, p.150; Altman, Homosexual, pp.214-215,225-226; D. Thompson, Flaws in the Social Fabric. Homosexuals and Society in Sydney, Sydney, George Allen and Unwin, 1985, pp.59,61,65-67; D. Sargent, 'Reformulating (homo)sexual Politics. Radical Theory and Practice in the Gay Movement', in J. Allen and P. Patton (eds), Beyond Marxism? Interventions After Marx, Leichhardt N.S.W., Intervention Publications, 1993, pp.166-167.
(increasingly irrelevant) church. Having come to see themselves as victims of unjust discrimination, not 'sick', the homophile organizations followed the example of the black civil rights movement in articulating homosexuals' grievances within a traditional liberal democratic framework. The New Left, Black Power and radical feminism provided a model for a more radical politics which gay liberation would take up.

Critical for the development of gay liberation, as for women's liberation, were the discourses of sexual liberation, particularly those derived from the Freudo-Marxists. Through this more radical strain of sexual liberation, sexuality was constituted as a legitimate site of political struggle, in company with gender, class, race and anti-colonial struggles. Through 'radical' sexual liberation, it was also possible to conceive a political project for homosexuals, individually and collectively. When coupled with a feminist analysis, homosexuality, or at least the potential for homo- or polymorphous sexuality in all people, could be understood to be a revolutionary force that could bring down the patriarchal-heterosexual social order.

The Stonewall riots catalysed these elements into a radically new homosexual consciousness and the distinct phenomenon of 'gay liberation'.\(^\text{52}\) As Faderman put it: "the gay liberation movement was an idea whose time had come".\(^\text{53}\)

II. GAY LIBERATION AND LESBIAN FEMINISM

Gay Liberation

In the immediate aftermath of the Stonewall riots, the homophile organization, the Mattachine Society, called for organized resistance by homosexuals to state harassment. Within a month, the Gay Liberation Front (G.L.F.), a title inspired by national liberation fronts abroad, had formed in New York. Soon after, Gay Liberation Fronts were established in other cities. Inspired by the American groups, London G.L.F. formed in


\(^{53}\) Faderman, Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers, p.195.
The name Gay Liberation Front signalled a new militancy and the revolutionary aspirations of homosexuals. Gay liberation believed that only a total revolutionary transformation of society would end the oppression of homosexuals. These revolutionary aspirations set the new gay liberationists apart from the older homophile activists who sought only assimilation into the mainstream and the extension of civil rights to homosexuals through reform measures. Understandably, relations between gay liberation groups and homophile organizations were often strained, if not antagonistic.

Following the example of Marxist-inspired black nationalists, gay liberationists now took liberal tolerance and integration to be oppressive strategies of the dominant racial/sexual groups. The reformist efforts of older homophile activists were also dismissed as manifestations of 'self oppression': the internalization of guilt, self-hatred and the values of the oppressor. The secretiveness of homosexuals and the furtive style of male homosexual liaisons, as in quick, anonymous sex in public toilets, was denounced. For gay liberationists, homosexuals had to come 'out of the closets and onto the streets', as a popular slogan of the time proclaimed. Influenced by the New Left and counter-culture movements, gay liberation also rejected the older homophile organizations on the grounds of their 'authoritarian', hierarchical structure. Gay liberation instead encouraged a more anarchistic, grass-roots style activism and collective organization. For their part, homophile groups (the Campaign for Homosexual Equality for example), denounced the G.L.F.'s Marxist analysis, counter-cultural style, zealotry and militancy. However, on many occasions, the more conservative groups and gay liberation groups engaged in joint actions.  

The early 1970s was homosexuals' moment of 'taking it to the streets'. The Mattachine Society and Daughters of Bilitis, sometimes alongside G.L.F. groups, demonstrated against police harassment and picketed businesses that had fired homosexual employees. They also demonstrated against newspapers and magazines that had given negative coverage to homosexuals and homosexual issues. In 1970 in the U.S. and 1971 in Britain, G.L.F. groups inaugurated the first of the

54 Adam, op.cit., pp.81-82; Weeks, Coming Out, pp.185,187,189.
55 Weeks, Coming Out, pp.186,189-191,193,206; Altman, Homosexual, pp.106-114,120.

The most unique and disruptive direct-action tactic was the 'zap'. Taken from the New Left and radical feminist movements, 'zapping' involved taking over an event which the group had an interest in but had not been invited to, and where they were certainly not welcome. The desired effect of zap actions was to bring homosexuals' grievances to public attention and to embarrass the organization or individual through direct confrontation and the publicity it generated. 'Victims' of zaps included gay bars which traditionally charged exorbitant prices, the inaugural meeting of the anti-gay British fundamentalist Christian organization, the Festival of Light, live television shows featuring anti-gay personalities and political meetings. The most notable zaps were perhaps those of psychiatric and medical conventions, particularly those of the American Psychiatrists Association (A.P.A.). These zaps, protesting behaviour modification treatment given to homosexuals, polarized members of the A.P.A. But with gays and lesbians represented on discussion panels at subsequent conventions, the issue of the psychiatric treatment of homosexuals soon came to a head. In 1973/74, the A.P.A. voted to remove homosexuality from their official diagnostic manual of disorders (D.S.M. III) and called for the enactment of civil rights (anti-discrimination) legislation for homosexuals.\footnote{N.S.W.A.D.B., op.cit., pp.104,107.} The American Psychological Society followed suit in 1975.\footnote{Weeks, Coming Out, pp.193-205; Adam, op.cit., pp.86-88; Altman, Homosexual, pp.97-98; Abbott and Love, op.cit., pp.212-213,162-165; G. Alinder, 'Gay Liberation Meets the Shrink', in K. Jay and A. Young (eds), Out of the Closets, Voices of Gay Liberation, New York, Jove/HBJ, Second Edition, 1977, pp.141-144 (article first published in 1970).}
In Australia, where there had been no history of organized homophile movements until 1969, old and new-style homosexual politics telescoped uneasily in the first post-Stonewall organization, the Campaign Against Moral Persecution (C.A.M.P.). Formed in Sydney in 1970, C.A.M.P., emulated the traditional British and American homophile organizations in analysis and strategy. For C.A.M.P., as for similar organizations which sprang up in all Australian state capitals soon after, the discriminatory treatment of homosexuals was caused by prejudice born out of ignorance. It was a problem that C.A.M.P. believed could be remedied by presenting the 'true facts' of homosexuality, hence its major focus on a public speaker's programme and organizing public forums, for instance on aversion therapy.  

C.A.M.P.'s tentativeness in taking up the American G.L.F.'s rhetoric and political analysis was signified by its refusal to adopt the term 'gay'. In other ways, however, C.A.M.P. was very much a 'gay liberation' organization. Its members were 'out' and gave interviews in the press and on television, often at great personal cost. In organizational structure, it was much more akin to the anti-hierarchical, anarchistic, grass-roots model of the American and British G.L.F. groups. Despite its concern not to alienate its more conservative members and the public at large, however, C.A.M.P. sometimes organized demonstrations and marches. It was this tension between old and new style homosexual politics that would split C.A.M.P. in 1972.

A short-lived Sydney Gay Liberation Front emerged at the same time as C.A.M.P. Dismissing C.A.M.P. as conservative and reformist, Sydney G.L.F. advocated the radical transformation of society through violent revolution. The more moderate Sydney Gay Liberation (S.G.L.) began as a consciousness-raising cell within C.A.M.P. and became a separate organization in 1972. S.G.L. and other emerging gay liberation groups were influenced in their political style and analysis by the U.S. and British Gay Liberation Fronts. Psychiatric conferences were zapped and street theatre protested the continuation of E.C.T. (electric shock therapy).

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59 Thompson, Flaws in the Social Fabric, pp.9-10; Wotherspoon, City of the Plain, pp.168,174-175.
treatment and aversion therapy, despite the Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists' 1972 determination that homosexuality was not necessarily a disorder. S.G.L. also organized marches - the first, for Gay Pride Week in 1973, ending in violent confrontation with police. On other occasions, as with their American and British counterparts, S.G.L. would work with C.A.M.P. on joint actions.  

Gay liberation groups were characterized by internal conflict and split apart very quickly. London G.L.F. folded in 1972 and S.G.L. (reorganized under the name Sydney G.L.F. in 1973) in 1974. The Gay Activists Alliance (G.A.A.) had split away from New York G.L.F. in its first year over the question of whether gay liberation should form a coalition with other liberation groups (most problematically, with the Black Panthers) or focus solely on the struggle of gays and lesbians. The G.L.F. groups had functioned as the 'shock troops' of the movement, ultimately strengthening the position of the more reformist groups who survived the upheavals of the early 1970s, or had formed in the aftermath. Throughout the 1970s, lesbian and gay groups formed within political parties, professional groups, the union movement, the churches and on university campuses. The earlier homophile groups that did survive, albeit in a more radicalized form (C.H.E. in Britain, G.A.A. in the U.S. and C.A.M.P. in Australia, for example), were now at the forefront of the civil rights and law reform push.

The 1970s was an era of rapid advance in homosexual law reform, anti-discrimination legislation and social service provision. Reformist gay and lesbian organizations, C.A.M.P. in Australia for example, engaged in political lobbying, courted powerful political allies, wrote submissions for Commissions of Enquiry and for the funding of services, and lobbied for inclusion of homosexuality into school sex education curricula, amongst other things. They sometimes, with mixed results, stood candidates in elections. In the 1970s, several political parties (for example, the Democrats in the U.S.) stood on a platform of gay and lesbian rights. During the 1970s, sodomy laws in half the states in the U.S. were

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62 Weeks, Coming Out, pp.196-198,200-201,204,206,217; Thompson, Flaws in the Social Fabric, p.54; Altman, Homosexual, p.98; Adams, op.cit., p.98; Faderman, Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers, p.197; C. Johnston, op.cit., p.18.
repealed and civil rights protection was enacted in a few dozen cities and states. In Australia, homosexual activity was decriminalized in South Australia progressively from 1972 to 1975, the Australian Capital Territory in 1976, Victoria in 1980, the Northern Territory in 1983, New South Wales in 1984, Western Australia in 1989 and Queensland in 1990. Tasmania remains the only state of Australia where homosexual activity between consenting adults still attracts criminal sanctions. Anti-discrimination legislation is now also in place in many Australian states.63

The reform moves in the 1970s was both strengthened by, and enabled, the consolidation of the gay male community in particular into a thriving, permanent and visible reality. Community organizations, newspapers and gay businesses proliferated to the point where, in some places, for the first time in modern history, it was quite possible to live one’s whole life within a homosexual community. A rich community culture has developed over subsequent decades with major contributions by lesbian and gay film-makers, artists and performers. From a 1990s Australian perspective, it is hard to imagine that one of the largest gay and lesbian cultural and community-affirming events in the world, the annual Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras, began in 1978 as a street march followed by police arrests.64

What I have described here is the formation of a predominantly gay male politics and culture in the 1960s and 1970s, to which lesbians made a significant contribution. At the same time, developments within feminism and gay liberation led to lesbians' separate organizing. Soon, lesbian feminism emerged as an autonomous political movement. It is to these developments that I now turn.


The emergence of lesbian feminism

Lesbian feminism has a more complex history of formation than gay liberation, constituting itself through its pivotal location at the intersection of feminism and the gay movement. In New Left circles, homosexuality had been seen as either a private (bedroom) issue or as bourgeois decadence. 65 Lesbians fared little better within liberal or radical feminism, and even gay liberation. The relationship of lesbians to these movements and the subsequent emergence of lesbian feminism as a distinct movement is perhaps best illustrated through the political history of one of its earliest proponents, Rita Mae Brown.

Rita Mae Brown, along with Martha Shelley and other soon-to-be gay liberationists, had founded the Student Homophile League at Columbia and New York Universities in 1967. 66 In 1968, Brown went on to join the liberal feminist lobby group the National Organization for Women (N.O.W.). Founded in 1966 by Betty Friedan, author of The Feminine Mystique, N.O.W. concerned itself with integrating women into the public sphere, achieving pay equity and improving employment opportunities and career prospects for women. In the late 1960s, increasing press speculation on the presence of lesbians within the women’s movement, and attempts to discredit the movement on that basis, led Friedan to characterize lesbianism as the ‘lavender menace’, the ‘weak link’ of the movement. Further, lesbian rights, to Friedan, constituted a red (or ‘lavender’) herring, diverting feminists’ attention from more important concerns. Friedan and the N.O.W. leadership therefore staunchly refused to deal with the issue of lesbian rights. 67

Brown’s pursuit of the lesbian rights issue within N.O.W. led to her being relieved of her responsibilities within the organization. In response, Brown along with several other lesbians resigned from N.O.W. in 1970, at the same time issuing a statement excoriating the organization for its homophobia. This, along with other events, including Time magazine’s attempt in the same year to discredit feminist author Kate Millett by

exposing her bisexuality, saw N.O.W. close ranks against lesbians. Throughout 1970-1971, N.O.W. was in a state of upheaval as 'out' lesbians were purged from the organization. In 1971, however, N.O.W. finally passed a resolution acknowledging the oppression of lesbians as a legitimate concern of feminism and supporting women's right to define and express their own sexuality, and to choose their own lifestyle. In 1973, N.O.W. called for civil rights (anti-discrimination) legislation for lesbians.⁶⁸

In the meantime, Brown had moved on to the radical feminist organization, Redstockings. Some radical feminists had publicly responded to Time magazine's 'lesbian-baiting' of the women's movement by proclaiming feminism's solidarity with lesbians and gay liberation. This strategy, along with N.O.W.'s resolution supporting lesbians, effectively ended the press's lesbian-baiting of the women's movement. For Redstockings, however, lesbianism was irrelevant to feminism and lesbians anti-feminist because, in Redstocking's eyes, they had abandoned the sexual battleground with men. The radical celibate groups Cell 16 and The Feminists were similarly antagonistic towards lesbianism, imagining lesbians were obsessed with sex and that lesbian relationships exemplified the male/female role playing that feminists sought to escape. In one exchange between Brown and Cell 16's Roxanne Dunbar in 1969, Dunbar stated: "homosexuality is a chosen oppression whereas being a woman is the root oppression. I don't think it's that important".⁶⁹

Attitudes such as these, prevalent within radical feminism at the time, forced lesbians like Brown into the gay liberation movement. Speaking both as gay liberationists and feminists, Brown and others continued to raise the issues of homophobia and heterosexism in the women's

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movement at women's liberation conferences. But despite G.L.F.'s initial 'feminist' analysis of gender roles, lesbians were marginalized in gay liberation groups. As women, lesbians within the predominantly male gay liberation movement found themselves in a similar situation to women in the New Left. Lesbians were accorded a secondary position within the organizations and sexism was pervasive. In response, Brown initiated a lesbian consciousness-raising group within New York G.L.F. From this group, which included ex-Student Homophile League member and ex-New York D.O.B. President Martha Shelley, the Radicalesbians emerged in 1970.\textsuperscript{70}

The Radicalesbians are most famous for their 'zap' of the N.O.W.'s 1970 Congress to Unite Women and for producing the first lesbian feminist position paper, 'The Woman Identified Woman'. To protest N.O.W.'s continuing hostility towards lesbianism at that time, the Radicalesbians took over the Congress's proceedings. The auditorium lights went out momentarily, during which time the Radicalesbians and their supporters, wearing T-shirts emblazoned with 'The Lavender Menace', took over the stage. The protestors held the floor for two hours, regaling the audience with accounts of discrimination against lesbians inside and outside the women's movement, and circulating copies of 'The Woman Identified Woman'. Many N.O.W. members present during the action supported the lesbians, an attitude which was not reflected by the leadership. The action had put lesbianism on N.O.W.'s agenda in a dramatic way but it was also one of the events which precipitated the purge of lesbians from N.O.W.'s ranks.\textsuperscript{71}

From the Radicalesbians, Brown in 1971/72 went on to co-found, with Charlotte Bunch, the first autonomous lesbian feminist group, The Furies.\textsuperscript{72} Shelley, Brown and Bunch were the main early proponents of


\textsuperscript{71} Echoes, op. cit., pp.214-215; Abbott and Love, op. cit., p.113.

lesbian feminism in the U.S., their work influencing the developing lesbian feminist movement worldwide.73

The emergence of lesbian feminism in Australia followed a slightly different course. Although Australian feminist and homosexual politics were heavily influenced by American developments, the chronological order of appearance of their various strands was somewhat different. This meant that the Australian movements both managed to avoid some of the more divisive experiences of their U.S. counterparts and developed their own peculiar forms and foci of concerns.

Organized feminism re-emerged in Australia in 1969/70. The Women's Liberation Movement (W.L.M.) was a eclectic grouping of feminists who represented a range of political backgrounds and positions. An internal debate between liberal reformists and more radical feminists on which strategies W.L.M. should pursue was resolved through the formation of the Women's Electoral Lobby (W.E.L.) by several W.L.M. members in 1972. Conceived as the Australian counterpart of N.O.W., particularly in its focus on lobbying and electoral politics, W.E.L. immersed itself in the Federal election of that year. W.E.L. surveyed politicians, assessed the different candidates' positions on women's issues and supported candidates who were most sympathetic to women's issues and who promised action upon election.74

Because the more radical W.L.M. had preceded the formation of the reformist W.E.L., unlike the U.S. experience, it was the Women's Liberation Movement that was initially concerned to reassure the public that they weren't lesbians. It was therefore the broader women's movement, rather than the liberal W.E.L., that bore the initial brunt of lesbians' criticism of the movement's heterosexism. Tensions came to a head at the W.L.M. conference in 1973 where a group of Tasmanian lesbians, the Hobart Women's Action Group, presented a paper, 'Sexism in the Women's Liberation Movement. Or, why do straight sisters

73 Charlotte Bunch, for instance, was influential in encouraging the development of lesbian separatism in Australia, delivering a paper on the topic at the 1975 International Women's Year Conference in Canberra (L. Ross, 'Escaping the Well of Loneliness', in Burgham and Lee (eds), op.cit., p.102). Lesbian feminist groups appeared in Britain in 1972, and in 1974 the first National Lesbian Conference was held (Weeks, Coming Out, pp.214-215).

sometimes cry when they are called lesbians?'. While this confrontation sent ripples through the women's liberation movement, Australia did not experience anything like the bitter recriminations and purges over lesbianism experienced in the U.S. movement.\textsuperscript{75}

At the same time, relations between men and women in G.L.F. groups and C.A.M.P. were becoming increasingly strained. Like their overseas counterparts, lesbians within C.A.M.P. and the G.L.F., were not only a numerical minority in these groups, but were also relegated to a secondary role. To talk about their own concerns in a more conducive environment, lesbian women in Sydney C.A.M.P. formed a women's-only discussion group in 1971, a move which was strongly resisted by the men. Ensuing tensions resulted in the women's group withdrawing from C.A.M.P. in 1972 and reconstituting itself as the Sydney branch of the Australasian Lesbian Movement (A.L.M.). A.L.M. had begun in 1969 as the Melbourne branch of the reformist lesbian group Daughters of Bilitis just as its American parent group was undergoing a radical reordering. Sydney A.L.M. was reconciled with C.A.M.P. soon after its formation, and reconstituted itself as the CAMP Women's Association (C.W.A.).\textsuperscript{76}

The C.W.A., like C.A.M.P., was generally hostile to both gay liberation and women's liberation. After some contact between the movements, however, the C.W.A. developed a more radical feminist and gay liberationist stance. Tensions between the radical and reformist factions within the C.W.A., as well as the unresolved tensions between the men and women, led to the demise of women's separate organizing within C.A.M.P. in 1973, although women would continue to work in C.A.M.P. Many of the radicalized C.A.M.P. lesbians moved not to gay liberation but to the women's liberation movement, which was now perceived to be 'lesbian friendly'. Lesbians in G.L.F., experiencing similar problems, also began organizing women's caucuses. The Melbourne Gay Women's Group (also known as Melbourne Radicalesbians) formed within Melbourne G.L.F. in 1973 and organized the first national lesbian

\textsuperscript{75} Summers, op.cit., pp.415-416; Ross, op.cit., pp.101-103; L. Lynch, 'Mythmaking in the Women's Movement', Refractory Girl, Summer 1974, pp.35-37. As yet, no comprehensive history of the Australian women's movement and its formative conditions has been published, so it is difficult to assess relations between lesbian and heterosexual feminists.

\textsuperscript{76} C. Johnston, op.cit., p.18; Wooterspoon, City of the Plain, p.168; Thompson, Flaws in the Social Fabric, pp.55-64; Willis, op.cit., pp.6-10. Melbourne Daughters of Bilitis, operating from U.S. D.O.S.'s 1950's Charter and action plan, could not come to terms with the more radical turn taken by its American parent group and, in protest, changed its name to the Australasian Lesbian Movement in 1970.
conference in the same year. Like their American counterparts, the autonomous lesbian groups that emerged from gay liberation and C.A.M.P. aligned themselves with the women's liberation movement and soon developed a feminist analysis of lesbian oppression.\footnote{Wills, op.cit., pp.12-20; The Melbourne Gay Women's Group, 'The Melbourne Gay Women's Group', in Mercer (ed) op.cit., pp.441-442; Ross, op.cit., p.103; S. Hawthorne, 'A History of the Contemporary Women's Movement', Journal of Australian Lesbian Feminist Studies, Vol.2, No.1, June 1992, p.74. There is some discrepancy between Ross and Hawthorne on the year of the first national lesbian conference. In Ross's account, the date is 1976.}

The emergence of gay liberation and lesbian feminism signalled a radical departure from nineteenth and early twentieth century understandings of homosexuality. Homosexual activism was no longer a politics organized within and confined to the pathologizing discourses of nineteenth century sexology. Instead, the emergence of the gay liberation movement signalled a radical shift in the mode of homosexuals' organized resistance to the normative regulation of sexuality. This resistance involved the questioning of the heterosexual norm and contestation of the category of homosexuality itself. And, while Edward Carpenter at the turn of the century presaged the radical potential of a meeting of socialism and homosexuality, its realization as a revolutionary programme was contingent upon the social, political and discursive conditions of the mid-twentieth century. Within two decades, a longstanding politics built on a 'reverse discourse' of homosexuals as 'sick', and thereby deserving of sympathy and help, not punishment, had given way to a gay liberationist politics in which homosexuals were figured as the political vanguard of a social revolution that would bring an end to all oppression.

But the very discourses that enabled such a dramatic refiguring of homosexuality, the Freudo-Marxism of Reich and Marcuse, also implicated gay liberation in nineteenth century sexology and the repressive hypothesis of sexuality. In the next section, I draw out the implications for gay liberation of Foucault's critique of the repressive hypothesis.
III. GAY LIBERATION AND THE REPRESSIVE HYPOTHESIS

The repressive hypothesis

The 'deployment of sexuality', outlined in Chapter 1, posited a 'sexuality' possessed by individuals which represents the 'truth' of the self. For Foucault, the regulatory effects of the individual's attachment to a sexual identity are secured by the belief that their sexuality is the subject of repression and that its liberation will bring health, happiness and freedom. The repressive hypothesis of sexuality, according to Foucault, consists of a narrative of how, beginning in the seventeenth century, sexual licence and openness was gradually superseded by an austere regime of sexual repression. From an era of openness on matters sexual, so the narrative goes, the experience of sexuality until well into the twentieth century was repressive and 'Victorian', where sex was subject to silence and secrecy, and sexual activity was strictly regulated by a puritan moral code in which only the sexual activities of the legitimate procreative couple were sanctioned. In this narrative, Freud emerges at the turn of the twentieth century as the great liberator of sexual libido, not only offering individual relief from the dire effects of sexual repression, but also initiating a progressive enlightenment on matters sexual that would gradually lead to a more liberal and healthy attitude towards sex.78

Earlier in this chapter, I outlined Marxists' revision of Freud's repressive hypothesis of sexuality. Freudo-Marxists like Reich and Marcuse held that libido (sex drive) is subject to repression in the service of capitalist relations of production. In terms of its political implication, the relationship between sexual repression and the emergence of bourgeois society could only mean one thing: that sexual liberation and the socialist revolution were intimately linked.

For gay liberation, the anti-repressive impulse of this radical (Freudo-Marxist) strand of sexual liberation was articulated in the concept of 'coming out'. If repression of homosexuality reduced the homosexual to silence and invisibility ('the closet'), then 'coming out' represented a 'victory' over repressive (capitalist-heterosexist) forces. It followed that, in

78 Foucault, The History of Sexuality, pp.3-5.
coming out, lesbians and gays were to a certain extent outside the reach of power and therefore free to express openly who they truly were.\textsuperscript{79}

In both its liberal and radical versions, then, this 'repressive hypothesis' of sexuality posits power's relation to sex as one of opposition, antagonism and repression while sex's relation to power is one of resistance and disruption, and even (potentially) liberation from it.

**Foucault's critique of the repressive hypothesis**

For Foucault, the repressive hypothesis' 'negative' conception of power's relationship to sexuality is itself a ruse of power. Foucault argues that power does not operate primarily in a repressive mode. Rather, as I noted in Chapter 1, for Foucault power works mainly to 'produce' sexuality as an object of study and regulation. In this 'regime of sexuality', modes of regulated subjectivity are produced through individuals' interpellation as subjects of discourses of sexuality. Individuals are inserted into mechanisms of regulatory power through attaching themselves to categories of sexual identity which purportedly represent the truth of themselves.

Through the belief that sex constitutes the (repressed) 'truth' of the self, whose discovery is imperative for health, integrity and freedom, power compels its confessional revelation. In the name of liberation from repressive power, individuals are incited to tell all about their sexual lives to family, friends, workmates, therapists, clergy and, for prominent people, even to the public at large. But what is revealed in this 'confession' of sexuality provides, for Foucault, not so much a liberatory 'truth' as more grist (knowledge) to power's regulatory mill. The revelation of the individual's sexual proclivities and most secret desires also exposes the confessing subject to the possibility of normative intervention.\textsuperscript{80} It is in this sense, therefore, that Foucault claims that "discourses on sex [do] not multiply apart from or against power, but in the very space and as the means of its exercise.\textsuperscript{81}

\textsuperscript{79} Ibid., pp.4-7.
\textsuperscript{80} Ibid., pp.12,34-35,59-64.
\textsuperscript{81} Ibid., p.32.
Foucault's critique of the repressive hypothesis was very much directed towards the contemporary sexual liberation projects, particularly gay liberation. The search for the 'truth' of gay sexuality, to Foucault, does not deliver liberation from the regime of sexuality but instead constitutes the mechanism through which individuals become further enmeshed in it. The 'permissive' moment's 'permissiveness' and the proliferation of 'sex talk' it encouraged did not signal freedom from power but, rather, marked a redefinition of codes of licit and illicit sexuality and a shift in the mode of sexual regulation. On this view, homosexual law reform over the past few decades can therefore be regarded as representing not so much power's retreat from private life as a shift in its mode of operation to that of the 'self regulation' of homosexuality.

The 'inversion' of the relation between power and sex, represented in the repressive hypothesis, works to hide the mechanisms of power so as to ensure its success, for "power is tolerable only on condition that it mask a substantial part of itself".\(^{82}\) For Foucault, the ruse of sexuality, and the power that works through it, is precisely in having us believe that our liberation is in the balance in subjecting ourselves "to that austere monarchy of sex, so that we bec[o]me dedicated to the endless task of forcing its secret, of exacting the truest confessions from a shadow".\(^{83}\)

In Foucault's reinterpretation of the history of sexuality, then, Freud is not seen as the great liberator of sexuality. Rather, the elaboration of psychoanalysis represents in Foucault's account the culmination of a longer standing deployment of sexuality whose aim was to transform sex into discourse through the compulsion to speak its truth.\(^{84}\) Reich, too, in positing a 'liberated' sex outside repressive power, and vigorously pursuing a 'scientia sexualis' which would reveal the 'truth' of sex, was, to Foucault, similarly implicated in the deployment of sexuality:

The fact that so many things were able to change in the sexual behaviour of Western societies without any of the promises or political conditions predicted by Reich being realized is

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\(^{82}\) Ibid., p.86. The 'juridico-discursive', 'top-down' conception of power is also evidenced, according to Foucault, in the characterization of power as aminating from a uniform and cohesive group of institutions and which ensures the subservience of citizens to a given state (pp.82-83,92,94).

\(^{83}\) Ibid., p.159.

\(^{84}\) Ibid., pp.158-159.
sufficient proof that this whole sexual 'revolution', this whole 'antirepressive' struggle, represented nothing more, but nothing less - and its importance is undeniable - than a tactical shift and reversal in the great deployment of sexuality. But it is also apparent why one would not expect this critique to be the grid for a history of that very deployment. Nor the basis for a movement to dismantle it.  

Gay liberation and the critique of the repressive hypothesis

Foucault's critique of the repressive hypothesis has profound implications for gay liberation's project. Drawing on Foucault, Jeffrey Minson, for example, implicates 'coming out' in the deployment of sexuality, figuring it as "the latest in a long line of organized rituals of confession". Coming out, when understood as a confessional practice, represents not so much the revelation and liberation of the secret truth of the self as a contemporary mechanism for the transformation of sex into discourse. To Minson, coming out serves to avow one's sexuality in a certain patterned way which is determined by the regulatory elements and rules of discourse operating within gay liberation consciousness-raising groups. In this sense, the consciousness-raising group, according to Minson, functions as a 'confessional' rather than as a vehicle for the expression of some universal set of homo-erotic dispositions. The authority vested in the consciousness-raising group, to Minson, imbues it with power relations which work to construct and regulate a particular form of homosexuality, a process in which the full weight of the disciplinary principle 'the political is personal' is brought to bear.

For Minson, coming out encourages the assumption of homosexuality as a totalizing identity (one which tags and implicates the subject's whole personality). Coming out, therefore, is a strategy in the deployment of sexuality, a contemporary mechanism for suturing individuals into categories of sexual identity. But, as I noted in Chapter 1, so long as

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85 Ibid., p.131. See also p.71.
homosexuals are oppressed and persecuted as homosexuals. For Foucault, while homosexual identity may be a starting point for a sexual politics, it is not its end:

I believe that the movements labelled 'sexual liberation' ought to be understood as movements of affirmation 'starting with' sexuality. Which means two things: they are movements that start with sexuality, with the apparatus of sexuality in the midst of which we're caught, and which make it function to the limit; but, at the same time, they are in motion relative to it, disengaging themselves and surmounting it.  

One of the concerns of this thesis is to identify the ways in which the contemporary lesbian and gay movements have both surmounted and remained implicated in the 'apparatus of sexuality'.

A related problematic of the repressive hypothesis is that of the nature of the subject to be liberated from sexual repression. Gay liberation's deployment of Marcusian discourse introduced a confounding proposition: that the 'true' sexuality to be liberated was not exclusively homosexual but polymorphously perverse. A Marcusian gay liberation project therefore called for the destruction of all sexual categories which would see an end to 'the homosexual'. The tension between this project, in its various guises, and an identity politics dedicated to the social and civil advancement of homosexuals, characterizes contemporary gay and lesbian discourse. Much of this thesis is

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90 Weeks, Against Nature, p.161. "The End of the Homosexual?" is also the title of a chapter in Altman's Homosexual. Altman in 1972 was aware of the tension between the claim to homosexual rights and the goal of gay liberation to break down the homo/hetero distinction (Homosexual, pp.218-220,225-226). Weeks also notes this paradox at the heart of gay liberation: "The analysis behind the concept of gay liberation suggested the arbitrary nature of sexual categories, the artificial limitation of a range of possible sexualities by restrictive moral norms. But the gay movement in itself simultaneously represented a definite advance in the fixing of the category, in the achievement almost of an ethnic identity" (Sex, Politics and Society, p.286). David Evans notes that the two projects often became hopelessly confused, pointing to the contradictory formulation of the London Gay Liberation Front's Manifesto which liberal rights claims are interspersed with revolutionary aspirations to overthrow the sexual order (D. T. Evans, Sexual Citizenship. The Material Construction of Sexualities, London and New York, Routledge, 1993, pp.114-117).

91 'Identity politics' refers to a gay-affirmative politics which has successfully used mainstream political processes to gain law reforms, extension of civil rights to homosexuals and other concessions from the state in much the same way as ethnic minorities. While I do not hereafter refer to this strand of homosexual politics, it has been the subject of much recent debate. See, for instance, Phelan, Identity Politics and Getting Specific; Chapter 8 in Weeks, Sexuality and its Discontents; Weeks, 'Questions of Identity' (Chapter 4 in Against Nature); D. Danielsen and K. Engie (eds), After Identity, New York and London, Routledge, 1995; S. Epstein, 'Gay Politics, Ethnic Identity: The Limits of Social Constructionism', Socialist Review, Vol.17, No.3+4, 1987, pp.9-54; E. Cohen, 'Who Are "We"?
concerned with investigating how these constitutive tensions and contradictory projects have worked out in lesbian and gay sexual politics over the past 25 years.

The analysis of lesbian feminism which follows is informed by Foucault's insight that the history of sexuality can only be a history of discourses of sexuality, their effects and their implication in positive relations of power. I take the position, along with Shane Phelan and Mark Blasius,\(^\text{92}\) that 'coming out' is a 'coming into' a discursive regime through which a new self and identity is constructed, even when the assumption of that identity is taken to reflect the liberation or discovery of the true self. In the next chapter I identify the discourses that lesbian feminists 'came out' into in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and the new forms of subjectivity, identity and regulation those discourses promoted.

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CHAPTER 3

EARLY RADICAL FEMINISM AND LESBIAN SUPREMACY

The previous chapter identified the social and political conditions of emergence of the modern feminist, gay and lesbian movements and the sometimes incompatible discursive elements from which these movements constructed their political projects. These projects' problematic suppositions about the relationship between power, sexuality and subjectivity contained in the 'repressive hypothesis' of sexuality, and the contradictory understandings of the 'nature' of the sexuality to be liberated (polymorphous or homosexual) were discussed. How these tensions worked out in radical and lesbian feminism is one of the concerns of this present chapter.

This chapter introduces the problematics of radical and lesbian feminist discourses through a discussion of their epistemological foundations. Here I show how modernist suppositions of self, knowledge, truth and power promoted by Marxism and liberalism, provided the framework for the elaboration of radical and lesbian feminism. It is my contention that the singularizing and totalizing logic of radical and lesbian feminism's constitutive discourses, particularly Marxism, compelled the production of 'one truth', a privileged site of feminist struggle, one programmatic prescription to end women's oppression and a privileged subject of feminist politics. Some of the differences between radical and lesbian feminist elaborations of the 'truth', and the conflicts they generated, are highlighted. How the lesbian came to be figured as a privileged subject of feminism is a particular focus of this chapter.

Throughout this chapter I draw on feminist critiques of traditional Western philosophy to discuss its 'problem of difference' and identify some of its effects in radical and lesbian feminism of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Appropriating masculinist discourses of Western philosophy to the feminist cause is shown to have produced an 'epistemological crisis' which most often worked to produce contradictory, confusing and sometimes incoherent arguments and projects. This epistemological legacy also produced forms of feminist theory which, to Moira Gatens,
acted "not as a means of explaining or understanding women's social status, but [as] another factor contributing to it".\(^1\) As I go on to show in Chapter 4, it was these theoretical impasses that motivated radical and lesbian feminism's shift to sexual essentialism.

I. THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF MARXISM AND LIBERALISM

Marxism and liberalism are epistemological heirs to Western philosophy's tradition of conceptually ordering the world into binary categories, and the Enlightenment's faith in the rational subject's capacity to apprehend a purported 'truth' of existence. In this section, I highlight those features of Western philosophy which characterize liberalism and Marxism and, through them, radical and lesbian feminism.

The binary ordering of the world

Since Aristotle, Western philosophy's principle of conceptual ordering, formulated through the logical contradiction A/Not-A, has divided the world into sets of mutually exclusive binary categories. The two terms of this dichotomous, either/or understanding are in an asymmetrical relation. 'A' is taken to be the primary, positive, normative term which dominates and characterizes the field constituted by the pair. 'Not-A' functions as a 'catch all' category, helping to define 'A' by representing all that 'A' is not. Further, operating from the principle of identity, there is no equivalence between the two terms of a pair: only 'A' is equal to 'A'; 'Not-A' can never equal 'A'. These binary pairs were further consolidated in seventeenth and eighteenth century Enlightenment philosophy and provide the foundation for modern thought. Drawing on a number of feminist discussions of Western philosophy,\(^2\) some of its key binaries can be briefly listed as follows:


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A</th>
<th>Not-A</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>self</td>
<td>other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>subject</td>
<td>object</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>male</td>
<td>female</td>
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<tr>
<td>positive</td>
<td>negative</td>
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<tr>
<td>human</td>
<td>animal</td>
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<tr>
<td>culture</td>
<td>nature</td>
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<tr>
<td>public</td>
<td>private</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mind</td>
<td>body</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>thought</td>
<td>senses/feelings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reason</td>
<td>passion/madness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>truth</td>
<td>falsity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reality</td>
<td>illusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>science</td>
<td>superstition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>objectivity</td>
<td>subjectivity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>good</td>
<td>evil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>transcendence</td>
<td>immanence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>immortality</td>
<td>birth/death</td>
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<tr>
<td>permanency</td>
<td>change</td>
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Through containing the world within either/or categories, Western philosophy established affinities between diverse elements (concepts, objects and experiences grouped together as either 'A' or 'Not-A') that have no intrinsic connection. These contingent relationships, as feminist critics have demonstrated, have worked to the detriment of women.

**The Enlightenment and Marxist projects**

Western philosophy's binary ordering of the world underpinned the Enlightenment project of seeking the 'truth' of existence through scientific method and the exercise of reason. For Enlightenment philosophers, material and social existence was governed by a set of uniform laws which are objectively, universally true and verifiable. This 'truth' is conceptually opposed to the personal and political interests of the rational subject who, through the right use of reason and scientific method, can purportedly transcend their historical and social situatedness and reach a state of pure, disengaged objectivity. The
Enlightenment's hope and promise was that, upon discovery, this 'truth' would provide a set of universal laws which, if obeyed, would free humankind of divisive conflict and domination. It was believed that, when operating from an objective knowledge of reality grounded in universal reason, enlightened government and science could only lead to freedom, progress and the benefit of all.\(^3\)

Enlightenment philosophers believed that this 'truth', apprehended directly by rational thought, could be represented directly in and through the 'neutral' medium of language. On the Enlightenment model, then, language is understood as the transparent mechanism of transmission of 'truth', simply corresponding to, through naming or otherwise bringing to light, that which is already objectively there.\(^4\)

Marxism is clearly located in this Enlightenment tradition. In its espousal of the theory of historical materialism, Marxism claims for itself the status of a science of human existence. As a 'true' discourse, Marxism claims to have discovered the objective, universal laws of history (Dialectics, or the logic of motion) whose end, like Reason, is universal emancipation. To this end, Marxism promotes a singular, programmatic prescription: the workers' revolution. In the Marxist telos, conflict and domination will disappear upon the overthrow of capitalist relations of production. The present social order based on class division will be replaced by a classless, socialist society.\(^5\)

For Marxists, class-consciousness (the recognition by workers of their true condition of exploitation) is the precondition of the workers' revolution. Standing in the way of class consciousness, according to Marxists, is 'false consciousness', a state of mystification of the true condition of working people induced in them through the domination of mental life in capitalist societies by 'false' bourgeois ideology. In its Marxist context, the enlightened Man of Reason assumes the form of the


objective intellectual who, possessed of true knowledge of the 'real'
conditions of existence, can bring the masses to class-consciousness
and lead the workers' revolution. In Lenin's revision of Marx, objective
intellectuals are refigured as the 'vanguard party' which possesses a
superior form of class-consciousness and whose task it is to articulate
the truth that the oppressed masses cannot themselves see.  

Marxist theory is both underpinned by and augments the binary
framework of Enlightenment philosophy. The innovative Marxist
conceptions of a material 'base' on which a 'superstructure' of cultural
manifestations is built, and of an objective 'truth' of science as against
false 'ideology', gain their intelligibility from already established
oppositions between true and false, reality and illusion, culture and
nature, reason and unreason and so on. Similarly, Marxism follows its
Enlightenment predecessors in its claim to universality.

In recent times, Marxism has promoted itself as the political vanguard
of all contemporary struggles against oppression. In the universalizing
spirit of Enlightenment philosophy, Marxist theory singularizes
oppression into one primary form - that of relations of economic
exploitation - and through one primary agency - the macrohistorical system of
capitalism. Specific struggles against male domination, racial domination
and imperial domination are reduced in Marxism to instances of capitalist
domination. It is assumed that, with the overthrow of capitalism, the
common enemy will be defeated and all other forms of (race, sex,
colonial) domination will simply evaporate. Hence Marxism's insistence
that all other struggles must be subsumed under the class struggle. In
this struggle, the figure of 'the worker' represents the universal subject of
emancipation: his emancipation will lead to the freedom of all.  
Notably, it
was precisely this insistence on the primacy of the workers' struggle, and
the manifest failure of workers' revolutions to secure sexual equality, that
led radical feminists to break with the New Left in the late 1960s.

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6 Mandel, op.cit., pp.89-90; Campioni and Gross, op.cit., pp.119-120,123,127; Jaggar, op.cit., p.57; M. Barrett,

7 Campioni and Gross, op.cit., pp.116-117,120-121,124; A. Yeatman, 'Interlocking Oppressions', in B. Caine and
Critiques of the Enlightenment and Marxism

The suppositions of Enlightenment philosophy that 'master narratives' such as Marxism and liberalism are built on have recently been the subject of critiques emanating from both feminism and contemporary 'post-structuralist' French philosophy. The Enlightenment proposition of the existence of an objective 'reality' governed by universal laws, which can be apprehended as a disinterested 'truth' arrived at through transcendent reason, is understood by critics to signal not only the conceit of its proponents, but also the means of their social domination. Through claiming as universal their own, situated story and representing it as the march of human progress, the exponents of the Enlightenment (privileged European men) at the same time legitimated their claims to political leadership of the newly emerging civil societies.

Claims to transcendent truth, to critics Mia Campioni and Elizabeth Gross, work to legitimize a particular social order and to produce a closure which prevents the question being asked: "who poses truth, from where, to whom and for what purpose?" On this critique, then, invoking the 'truth' works to obscure the power relations immanent in the production of any knowledge and the relations of domination effected through 'regimes of truth'. For, rather than truth and power existing in a relation of exteriority to each other, power is exercised through 'truth': "truth is already power".

The transcendent reasoner's positioning at an 'Archimedean point', a place 'outside' from where 'reality' may be viewed objectively, represents, in the post-structuralist critique, a claim to authority through the disavowal of the observing subject's inescapable immersion in historical conditions. The notion of the 'rational individual', conceived on a model of the stable, unified and coherent self which is transparent to itself and capable of insight into the laws of nature, has been problematized by psychoanalytic theory. The universal human subject of 'humanist' Enlightenment discourse, liberalism and humanist forms of Marxism is seen by its critics as a fictive device that has only become 'naturalized'

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8 Campioni and Gross, op.cit., p.127.
through its repeated discursive production as a human 'essence'. This singular, universal human subject is also demonstrably, if implicitly, male.

The male 'bias' of Western philosophy, according to feminist philosophers, has historically justified the exclusion of women from philosophical discourse, civil society and political representation. More radical philosophers such as Genevieve Lloyd, Elizabeth Grosz, Moira Gatens and Susan Bordo argue that women's exclusion is no mere oversight that can simply be corrected by somehow 'adding women in' to philosophical discourse. Western philosophy, they argue, is not gender-neutral: the exclusion of women is build into its epistemological foundations.

The primary evidence for the structural exclusion of women and 'the feminine' from Western philosophical discourse is found in the gendered nature of the binary categories which order the world. In the Western philosophical tradition, 'male' is the dominant, valorized 'A' term in relation to the secondary, negative term 'female'. 'Woman', constituted through her conceptual association with other 'Not-A' categories, represents all that 'man' is not: irrational, dominated by senses and feelings, passionate, subjective, weighted down by the (reproductive) body and grounded in immanence. In this scheme, 'woman' is the object of knowledge: that to be known, not a 'knower' herself.

The gendered binary division of the world, to Nancy Jay, works to legitimize the inequitable relations between the sexes through the proposition that women are, indeed, 'less than' men. Carole Pateman argues that it was on the basis of this perceived essential 'lack' - as incapable of reasoned agreement or of honouring it - that women were excluded from the social contract on which modern civil government is based. Similarly, Pateman reports, it was argued that women were unfit for civic life and public office on the basis of their purported incapacity to use reason to sublimate their passions. The sublimation of the passions,

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10 Campion and Gross, op.cit., p.126; Flax, Thinking Fragments, pp.8,30,32-35,37. For a discussion of the earlier Marx as a humanist, in his formulation of an unalienated essence of human existence or 'human nature', see Campion and Gross, op.cit., p.129; Barrett, op.cit., pp.35-36,65-60. The American New Left was very much a form of humanist Marxism.


and a disinterested sense of justice and political morality, is, in traditional political ethics, the necessary precondition for upholding civil law. As women were seen to be incapable of developing these qualities, they were deemed to be unfit for civic life and public office. Accordingly, feminist philosophers argue, modern notions of citizenship and the 'body politic', are conceived on a male model.\(^\text{13}\)

The most problematic proposition arising from Western philosophy's binary ordering of the world is that to be human is to be male. Both Bordo and Lloyd argue that Western ideals of humanity and reason have historically excluded the feminine. For Lloyd, 'femininity' itself has been partially constituted through its exclusion from reason.\(^\text{14}\) For Bordo, the concepts of objectivism, autonomy and transcendent reason represent a male 'flight from the feminine'.\(^\text{15}\) The suggestion contained within the Enlightenment project, then, is that becoming human by becoming rational is also to become male.

The linking of 'human' with 'male' sits in tension with the 'universal human subject' of Enlightenment philosophy which, theoretically, included women. It was on the basis of the Enlightenment's proposition that all humans shared a capacity for the development of reason that liberal feminists from Mary Wollstonecraft onwards have argued for the provision of education for women as the first step to full civil equality.\(^\text{16}\) This contradictory status of women within Western philosophy - as both human (by virtue of being a member of the generic human species) and 'not-human' (i.e. 'not-man') - is a confounding element in modern feminism. That women cannot be easily inserted into a cultural ideal that is premised on the exclusion of women and 'the feminine' prompted Lloyd's observation that "there are not only practical reasons, but also conceptual ones, for the conflicts women experience between Reason and femininity".\(^\text{17}\)


\(^\text{14}\) Lloyd, op.cit., pp.x,x04.

\(^\text{15}\) Bordo, op.cit., p.441.


\(^\text{17}\) Lloyd, op.cit., x.
The relation of 'woman' and the feminine to 'man' and the masculine in Western philosophy, then, is either one of 'sameness' (where 'woman' is subsumed by 'man' through possession of an implicitly male 'humanity') or one of complementary, though less valued, 'opposite'. This reduction of woman to man (through modes of both 'sameness' and derivative negative 'difference') in Western philosophy is, for Elizabeth Grosz, the defining feature of 'phallocentrism'.

The practical implication of phallocentrism, when coupled with the principle of identity (A=A), noted earlier, is that equivalence of value and equal treatment is granted only on the basis of 'sameness'. That is, only between men or between women (and not between men and women) does equality obtain. Women, as different or other ('Not-A') to men, are not equal to men. The principle of identity has an utterly confounding effect, not only in questions of the presumed universality of civil rights, but also in practical jurisprudence, as Joan Scott has graphically demonstrated in her analysis of an American anti-discrimination case. Examples like hers highlight women's structural disadvantage in social/legal/political systems built on Western epistemological foundations, and demonstrate Western philosophy's incapacity to conceive difference qua difference.

The 'problem of difference', which from here on I take to mean traditional Western thought's conceptual incapacity to conceive of difference in terms other than some form of reduction to a primary, normative term, is a constitutive element of radical and lesbian feminist thought. The 'phallocentrism' of all feminist discourses, effected through their constitutive discourses (Enlightenment and humanist via Marxism and liberalism), works to confound feminists' theoretical and practical efforts. In the next section I explore the effects of the problematics of Western philosophy identified here, and of the repressive hypothesis (identified in Chapter 2), in radical and lesbian feminist discourses.

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II. THE MASTER NARRATIVE OF RADICAL FEMINISM

Radical feminism's 'master narrative', in its totalizing account of the origin and maintenance of women's oppression, in its characterization of patriarchy as a global, 'top-down' system of domination, and in its political project and telos - a post-patriarchal utopian society - clearly replicates its Marxist antecedents. In this section I outline early American radical feminism's 'master narrative' and draw out its problematics through considering the work of three of its earliest major theorists: Kate Millett, Shulamith Firestone and Ti-Grace Atkinson.

Patriarchy as a totalizing world system

Patriarchy, as defined by Millett, is a social order characterized by the systematic domination of women by men, in which every avenue of power is in male hands and all social and political institutions are controlled by men. Patriarchy is both transhistorical and transcultural: our present society, as were all other historical civilizations, according to Millett, is a patriarchy. For radical feminists, the relations between men and women in a patriarchal social order constitute a 'sex-class' system. In this system, the interests of women and men are fundamentally in conflict. Relations between the sexes in a patriarchal society are, therefore, understood by radical feminists to be essentially antagonistic.

Men's domination of women, according to radical feminists, constitutes the primary form of social oppression. As Atkinson put it: "all known cultures are constructed with the oppression of women as the major foundational ingredient". Accordingly, radical feminists claimed that the sex-class system provides the model for all other forms of domination. Both racism and economic exploitation are taken to be essentially sexual phenomena. For Firestone "racism is sexism extended", hence her confident claim, following her Marxist

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21 Atkinson, Amazon Odyssey, pp.96-42,53; Firestone, op.cit., pp.16-17; Redstockings, 'Redstockings Manifesto', in Morgan (ed.), Sisterhood is Powerful, p.534.
22 Atkinson, Amazon Odyssey, p.42. See also Firestone, op.cit., p.43; Millett, op.cit., p.25.
23 Firestone, op.cit., p.105. See also p.43 and Redstockings, 'Manifesto', p.534.
predecessors, that "[radical feminism] alone succeeds in pulling into focus the many troubled areas of the leftist analysis, providing for the first time a comprehensive revolutionary solution".24

As patriarchy was the primary, determinative system of all relations of domination, its overthrow promised universal emancipation. Radical feminists argued that when women are liberated from the sex-class system through a feminist revolution, the liberation of all other oppressed peoples will follow. As Atkinson put it: "Other oppressed groups are . . . dependent on our liberation".25 In radical feminism, then, 'woman' replaced the 'worker' as the subject of universal emancipation, and the global sisterhood of women superseded the proletariat as the force for global revolution.

Through appropriating Marxism, radical feminists constructed a project which was both legitimate and intelligible within the political context of the times. In its claim to represent all other struggles, however, radical feminism replicated Marxism's self-constitution as the master-knowledge of oppositional politics. Recall that it was radical feminists' rejection of the universality of the socialist revolution and its assumption that women's liberation would follow the liberation of the proletariat that had led to their departure from the Left.

One implication of radical feminism's own 'master narrative' was, ironically, the domination of radical feminist politics by its proponents - white, Western, middle-class feminists - and its refusal to accept race, class and national differences between women as other than derivative phenomena. The suppression of differences between women - through constituting a totalizing narrative of women's oppression and a coherent category 'woman' which reflected white women's experiences - along with radical feminism's demand that all women should 'put the women's

24 Firestone, op.cit., p.43. The Manifesto of Redstockings, a group Firestone co-founded, reiterated this radical feminist axiom: 'Male supremacy is the oldest, most basic form of domination. All other forms of exploitation and oppression (racism, capitalism, imperialism etc.) are extensions of male domination' (Redstockings, 'Manifesto', p.534). This is also the position of The Feminists, a group founded by Atkinson ('The Feminists: A Political Organization to Annihilate Sex Roles', in A. Koedt, E. Levine, A. Rapone (eds), Radical Feminism, New York, Quadrangle, 1973, p.370, manifesto written in 1969).

25 Atkinson, Amazon Odyssey, p.74.
revolution first’, alienated black and ‘third world’ feminists from the movement.26

Radical feminism’s ‘problem of difference’ did not stop at questions of race, class and nationality, however. It further manifested as what Gatens calls a "mischaracterisation of relations of difference as relations of superiority and inferiority".27 Radical feminists unwittingly promoted the proposition, contained within the principle of identity (A=A), that to be different (Not-A) to the primary, valorized term of a binary pair, is to be unequal (inferior) to, and to be properly dominated by, the primary term. In relation to the male/female dyad, this problematic supposition is evidenced in radical feminist's accounts of the origins of patriarchy.

Difference and domination: the roots of women's oppression

Sexual difference, for Firestone and Atkinson, was the root cause of women's oppression. Closely following the Marxist formula, Firestone argued that the social sex-class division arose from the relations of reproduction. The first division of labour, according to Firestone, was that between women and men for the purposes of reproduction of the species. This division of labour was based on the biological fact that it is women who give birth. Drawing heavily on Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, Firestone, with Atkinson, argued that women's periodic cycle, childbirth, suckling of infants and menopause were inherently debilitating, leaving women vulnerable and dependent on men for their physical survival. According to Firestone and Atkinson, men took advantage of this 'natural' inequality between the sexes, consolidating it into a sex-class system in which men control and exploit women's bodies and the reproductive process. Over time, they claimed, men's systematic


domination and control of women became institutionalized in the form of the patriarchal family and marriage.\textsuperscript{28}

For Firestone, it is these institutions - marriage and the family - along with women's psychological dependency on men born out of their condition of oppression, and the ever-present threat of physical force, that today maintains women's oppression. According to Firestone and the group she co-founded, Redstockings, women's apparent passivity and acquiescence to patriarchy is the effect of continuous coercion and powerlessness.\textsuperscript{29} Firestone and Redstockings explained female gender characteristics in similar terms, arguing that "[women's] prescribed behaviour is enforced by the threat of physical violence".\textsuperscript{30}

While believing women are 'coerced' into bearing children through the institutions of marriage and the family, Atkinson also claimed that women are coerced into sexual intercourse against their sex-class interests. Women, she argued, are subject to conditioning to a sexual 'need' and have learned vaginal orgasm as a 'mass hysterical survival response'. Further, 'love', Atkinson claimed, is a psychopathic condition akin to false consciousness: a deluded state in which women's real condition of oppression is obscured and in which state she can be otherwise unaccountably attracted to her oppressor.\textsuperscript{31}

For Atkinson, the connection between 'coerced' reproduction and sexual intercourse led her to posit that sexual intercourse itself is an imposed institution of male domination. "'Sex'", she claimed, "is based on the differences between the sexes" (italics hers).\textsuperscript{32} Heterosexual intercourse, as the site of the interrelation between the two sex-classes, was, therefore, to Atkinson, fundamentally oppressive to women.

\textsuperscript{28} Firestone, op.cit., pp.12,14,16-18.

\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., pp.121,126-127,139. This is also the position of New York Radical Feminists, another group that Firestone co-founded. See their 'Politics of the Ego: A Manifesto For N.Y. Radical Feminists', in Koedt, Levine and Rapone (eds), op.cit., pp.379-383 (manifesto originally written in 1969).

\textsuperscript{30} Redstockings, 'Manifesto', p.533.

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., pp.6,13-14,16,18,43,63,85-86. This was also the position of The Feminists, op.cit., p.375. Echols, op.cit., p.146 reports Atkinson remonstrating with one woman that sexual desire was all in her head - that is, not 'real'. See also Atkinson's associate D. Densmore, 'On Celibacy', in Tanner (ed.), op.cit., pp.264-268, and D. Densmore, 'Independence From the Sexual Revolution', in Koedt, Levine, Rapone (eds), op.cit., pp.107-118 (article originally published in 1971).

\textsuperscript{32} Atkinson, Amazon Odyssey, p.65. See also pp.14-17,19,52-54.
Atkinson's conflation of the two meanings of 'sex' - sexual activity and sexual difference - together with the understanding that difference constitutes domination, proved crucial to radical feminism's construction of sexuality as the privileged site of feminist struggle and to the concomitant formation of a vanguard of celibate feminists.

Firestone's commitment to a materialist analysis led her to the problematic proposition that the root cause of women's oppression is, ultimately, their own biology. For Gatens, de Beauvoir's and Firestone's tacit acceptance of the phallocentric values inherent in the mind/body, nature/culture distinctions underpinning their arguments could only lead to their devaluation of women's difference and those things peculiar to them, such as reproduction. Only through the tacit acceptance of women's devaluation could Firestone claim that pregnancy is "barbaric".  

To Lloyd, views such as Firestone's endorse the assumption that "the only human excellences and virtues which deserve to be taken seriously are those exemplified in the range of activities and concerns that have been associated with maleness".  

The binary philosophical framework on which Firestone and Atkinson's account of women's oppression is built, as Lloyd's quote above suggests, works to problematize women's status as 'human'. Like most early radical feminist writers, Firestone slips between a claim that the condition of both men and women in a sex-class society is that of being only 'half-human', and a claim that women's different (reproductive) biology has cost them their 'humanity'. Such confusions over the half-human or non-human status of women can be traced to radical feminism's deployment of the ostensibly gender-neutral, but implicitly male, universal human subject to represent women. This problematic

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33 Gatens, Feminism and Philosophy, pp.2-3; Firestone, op.cit., p.188. For Atkinson (Amazon Odyssey, p.15) pregnancy is so 'unhealthy' for women that they would not go through it if they had the choice. While Firestone on the one hand saw pregnancy as 'barbaric' and a temporary deformation of the body, on the other hand she elsewhere (p.19) seems to concede that it is the meaning of sexual difference which is the problem, not women's bodies. Per se, Firestone's literalism here derives from her materialist analysis - she generally eschewed the 'ideological' argument for reasons I will discuss later. Firestone's position on reproduction and motherhood also placed her apart from many feminists at the time. See A. Rich, Of Woman Born, London, Virago, 1977 (first published in 1976) and M. O'Brien, The Politics of Reproduction, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981, and Echols, op.cit., p.112.

34 Lloyd, op.cit., p.104.

35 Firestone, op.cit., p.192. Firestone here could be read as offering a critique of these characterizations of women if it were not for the fact that she immediately after takes this characterization to be the literal truth, and on which she later builds her political programme.
status of women becomes most acutely amplified in the radical feminist sex-role theory of Kate Millett.

**Difference and domination: sex-role theory**

While Millet, too, speculated on the origin of the sex-class division, she was more interested in the question of its present maintenance. Like Atkinson, Millet was more disposed to the 'ideological' explanation: that the patriarchal order is maintained through women's conditioned consent to patriarchal ideology.\[^{36}\] The problem of difference in Millett's work manifests in the humanist claim of the a-priori 'sameness' (humanity) of men and women and, on that basis, the essential equality of the sexes at birth. Gender differentiation is achieved, according to Millett, through the imposition of a superstructure of culturally prescribed masculine and feminine characteristics and behaviours. These sex-role characteristics and behaviours are internalized by individual boys and girls in the process of socialization, primarily in the family context. For Millett, then, gender differentiation is an arbitrary, superstructural effect of patriarchy and cannot be inferred from the biological (reproductive) differences between the sexes. Similarly, Millett cast doubt on the 'naturalness' of heterosexuality, suggesting that sexual behaviours and sexual object choice are also learnt responses.\[^{37}\]

Radical feminist role theory, as developed by Millett, rests on a body/mind, nature/culture distinction and a rationalist conception of the subject. Elaborating psychologist Robert Stoller's thesis that biological 'sex' and social 'gender' can be conceptually separated, and privileging the mind (conceived as a 'blank slate') over a (sexed) body, Millett posits the cognitive training or 'conditioning' to masculine and feminine gender roles. 'Feminine' gender characteristics - passivity, submissiveness, servility and obedience - far from being natural attributes of biological women, are, to Millett, political constructs imposed on women to ensure men's power and superior status. 'Masculine' aggression, intelligence

\[^{36}\] Millett, op.cit., pp.26,28.

\[^{37}\] Ibid., pp.23,26-28,30,32-33,35,54,55,117.
and forcefulness, similarly, are qualities inculcated in men in the course of their conditioning to the role and 'personality' of the master class.  

Conditioning to differential gender attributes and roles, achieved through a system of reward and punishment for appropriate and inappropriate gender behaviour, is usually so complete, Millett contends, that compliance to the patriarchal social order and ideology does not require force. Internalized gender training's and romantic love (which, for Millett too, amounts to a state of false consciousness) function to maintain women in their social role and secondary social status position. The conditioning itself is reinforced by peer pressure and by representations of gender norms in the mass media, Millett claimed. However, she added, if conditioning fails and women's compliance is not secured, men always have recourse to force and coercion.  

The conditioned states of 'masculinity' and 'femininity', each of which to Millett represents only half the full potential of an individual's humanity, renders men and women only 'half-human'. Again, however, women's sexed embodiment confounds a feminist mobilization of the 'universal human' to an argument about the alienating effects of patriarchy. In Millett's account, the traditional coupling of 'male' and 'human' re-emerges in her claim that the assignment of women to domestic service and the care of infants tends to arrest them at the level of biological experience (immanence). What is distinctly human (everything beyond animal activity/reproduction), she claims, is reserved for the male. Like Firestone and Atkinson, in tacitly accepting that women's secondary status derives from reproduction, which confines her to immanence, Millett unwittingly reinscribed phallocentric values within feminism. 

Radical feminist role theory offered what, at the time, seemed a compelling account of women's acquiescence to male domination. Against Firestone, feminist role theorists could argue that there was no

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38 Ibid., pp.26-28,31-32. The idea of sex 'roles' was very popular in liberal feminism, which perhaps explains Millett's interest: she was a past member of N.O.W. Role theory became extremely influential in early 1970s feminism. See, for example, A. Oakley, Sex, Gender and Society, Melbourne, Sun Books, 1972; C. Hallbrun, Toward a Recognition of Androgyny, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1973; A. Kaplan and J. Bean (eds), Beyond Sex-Role Stereotypes: Readings Toward a Psychology of Androgyny, Boston, Little Brown, 1976.

39 Millett, op.cit., pp.33,37,43. See also Atkinson, Amazon Odyssey, p.43.

40 Millett, op.cit., p.32.

41 Ibid., p.26.
link between biology and behaviour that could justify male domination. Actual biological (reproductive/genital) differences between the sexes were played down in all feminist versions of role theory, and the notion of any essential connection between biological 'sex' and cultural 'gender' rejected. Instead, conditioning gave the appearance of 'nature' to behaviours and roles that were ideological constructs designed to keep women in a subordinate position. Through role theory, feminists believed they could effectively counter the predominant view that women's secondary social position was due to her 'natural' inferiority, as I discussed in Chapter 1. Yet the 'maleness' of the shared 'human nature' of men and women, on which basis both liberal feminists and liberal-radicals like Millett claimed equal rights, revealed itself through an implicit insistence that women must disavow (or consider to be inconsequential) their embodied (reproductive) difference in order to attain the status of 'human'. The problematic implications of this phallocentric logic becomes apparent in radical feminism's political projects.

Beyond difference: the political projects of radical feminism

In traditional Western philosophy, as I have noted, difference from the dominant, normative term of a binary pair is understood to represent a negative, inferior value or thing. Femaleness, associated with animality and immanence, in this scheme is consigned to an inferior, or even non-human, status. On the basis of these implicit understandings, radical feminists like Firestone and Atkinson argued that women's embodied difference underpinned male domination. Millett avoided this conceptual problem by simply ignoring sexed embodiment, although the problem of difference reappeared in the guise of the universal, transcendent (but implicitly male) 'human'.

In terms of constructing political goals, it followed that women's liberation from male domination to the status of a fully human and free subject demanded achieving an equivalence to men. If, as it was argued, the constitution of the sex-classes on the grounds of reproductive difference was the move that preceded patriarchy, then it followed that the destruction of the sex-classes (which implied the obliteration of
sexual difference), was central to women's liberation. Radical feminists' 'juridico-discursive' conception of power also dictated the necessity of total revolution - the overthrow of all the institutions in which patriarchal power was said to reside, in particular the family and marriage.\textsuperscript{42}

The project of destroying sexual difference for the sake of equality is a manifestation of the phallocentric demand that humanity be purchased through disavowing, underplaying or neutralizing (women's) sexed embodiment. As Lloyd has observed, 'equality' requires that women must struggle with their own (reproductive) bodies if they are to transcend their bodily being and achieve true human selfhood.\textsuperscript{43}

For Firestone, this logic informed her argument that, just as the end of the socialist revolution is the demise of class distinction, so too is the end of sexual difference the goal of the feminist revolution. While what she meant by 'the end of sexual difference' is that genital difference would not matter culturally \textit{after the revolution}, Firestone's means to that end was more material than representational. The natural sexual imbalance of power that allowed male domination can be overcome, Firestone claims, by simply freeing women from the tyranny of reproduction. The Enlightenment's transcendent impulse is at work in Firestone's proposition that freedom from biological conditions is now at hand in the form of artificial reproduction. Extra-uterine reproduction, she believed, was imminently possible through new developments in reproductive technology. But, she cautioned, just as men were able to exploit women through biological reproduction, so too might men exploit women through artificial reproduction. This meant, for Firestone, that, like the proletariat's temporary dictatorship over production in Marxism, women would have to (temporarily) seize control of the means of reproduction.\textsuperscript{44}

Atkinson's project proceeded from the proposition that 'sex' (heterosexual intercourse) derived from sexual difference. For Atkinson, overthrowing male supremacy and dismantling the sex-class system therefore demanded that sex be abandoned. Accordingly, Atkinson and

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\textsuperscript{43} Lloyd, op.cit., pp.41,44,49,101.

\textsuperscript{44} Firestone, op.cit., pp.18-19,193. This was also Atkinson's (\textit{Amazon Odyssey}, p.20) and The Feminists' (op.cit., p.378) position.
the groups she was associated with advocated celibacy as a revolutionary political strategy. Atkinson nevertheless believed that sexual intercourse might be salvaged if all its institutional and functional aspects were eliminated - that is, reproduction and the ideologies that induce the false state of consciousness that is sexual desire. In Atkinson's scheme, then, post-patriarchal 'sex' might not be sexual intercourse at all, but rather non-genital forms of pleasure.\(^{46}\)

Atkinson, like Firestone, imaged the form of liberated womanhood through the figure of the universal human in its 1960s incarnation - the androgyne. Radical feminist role theorists like Millett, who posited the equally oppressive effects of sex-role conditioning on both men and women, similarly imaged the liberated individual free of gender roles on the model of the androgyne. The androgyne, representing the assimilation of the best aspects of the 'masculine' and the 'feminine', was seen to possess the full complement of positive human qualities. The oppressive behaviours and characteristics of the female role which, for 'coercion' theorists like Firestone, were forced upon women, would simply fall away once the coercive institutions of patriarchy had been dismantled. For Millett and the 'conditioning' theorists, however, not only did social structures need changing in a 'cultural revolution' achieved without resort to armed struggle, but so too did consciousness need revolutionizing. Liberation, for role theorists, therefore also involved a programme of self-transformation, an 'unlearning' of sex-roles and relating to each other as individuals, not as a sex.\(^{46}\)

The conditioning thesis, based on a rationalist model of subjectivity in which the mind is privileged over the body, and 'consciousness' construed as the privileged site of social change, promotes the possibility for a radical feminist vanguardism, as I now go on to show.\(^{47}\) And

\(^{46}\) Atkinson, *Amazon Odyssey*, pp.14,19-22. This was also the position of members of the radical celibate groups Cell 16 and *The Feminists*. See Denomore, works cited, for example. The Feminists implemented the policy on celibacy in their own ranks, imposing a quota on how many members of their organization could be married or living with a man (*The Feminists*, op.cit., p.374; Atkinson, *Amazon Odyssey*, pp.42-43).

\(^{46}\) Millett, op.cit., pp.62,362-363. Millett's programmatic prescriptions essentially reiterate amorphous liberal humanist aspirations. But her thesis implicitly posits the impossible - a socialization to nature (a human in its 'natural state') - the androgyne. Millett's text, and role theory in general, exemplifies the contradiction in the status of the 'human' in Western philosophy.

\(^{47}\) For a discussion of these and other problematic suppositions of role theory's sex/gender distinction, see Gatens, 'A Critique of the Sex/Gender Distinction' and L. Nicholson, 'Interpreting Gender', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, Vol.20, No.1, Autumn, 1994, pp.79-105. Butler, *Gender Trouble*, pp.6-9, undertakes a radical critique of the category 'natural sex' as well as 'gender.'
'conscience raising', purportedly the means to achieve revolutionary consciousness, is also shown in the next section to be a practice through which individuals inserted themselves into radical feminism's 'regime of truth'.

'Truth' and a place 'outside': vanguardism and separatism

Acquiring class-consciousness, for Marxists, was the precondition of the workers' revolution. Similarly, for radical feminists, sex-class consciousness was the precondition for women's revolutionary action. Sex-class consciousness, according to radical feminists, could only come from women's own knowledge of their real political condition. The process of consciousness-raising, though which sex-class consciousness would be realized, began with the practice of 'speaking bitter' or 'speaking pain to recall pain'. This practice, developed initially by the Chinese Communists and taken up in the U.S. by the Black movement, involved the public testimony of personal grievances against one's oppressors. Radical feminists' testimony of their treatment at the hands of men was delivered in small consciousness-raising groups.48

Through the process of consciousness-raising, what women previously perceived to be their personal problems with men were reconceptualized as common, shared experiences. No longer could women's problems be individualized or personalized, nor seen as arising from women's own inadequacies or neuroses. Rather, these collective experiences could be understood to be the effects of women's condition of subjection. Through consciousness-raising, knowledge was produced which claimed to reveal the sexist foundation of all social institutions and the coercive mechanisms of patriarchy. From this foundation of knowledge, it was then possible to develop a feminist programme for collective political action.49


This politicization of the personal, representing the achievement of an enlightened consciousness of women's true condition, was a condition of possibility for a radical feminist political project. Like the shifts that occurred in homosexuals' self-understandings over the same period of time, women could conceive of themselves as oppressed, rather than as inadequate or inferior. This contestation of traditional meanings of being female in turn enabled women's self-reconstitution as potentially revolutionary subjects. It was through such changing self-perceptions that women were motivated to organize politically.

Consciousness-raising, like homosexuals' 'coming out' into a 'gay' discursive regime, can be understood as a confessional technology which accomplished the insertion of individuals into the 'truth regime' of radical feminism through the ruse of its authentic knowledge of women's condition. While ostensibly relying on the unproblematized notion of women's 'experience' as the basis for a 'bottom-up', generalizable theory of women's oppression, the knowledge that was produced was instead constituted through the structural principles of radical feminism. This is not surprising given the questions through which the personal testimony was elicited and subsequently framed. These questions were already implicated in radical feminist theory, in which an 'effective' consciousness-raising group leader was meant to be trained.\(^{50}\) That to 'speak out' in a way that constituted 'consciousness-raising' was to be already speaking through a radical feminist discourse is confirmed by the observation that 'speaking bitter', without some external referent (radical feminist theory), was not 'productive' - that is, it only functioned to 'let off steam'.\(^{51}\)

The normative operations of consciousness-raising are apparent in its 'confessional' approach. Consciousness-raising elicited a 'confession' (the testimonial of personal experience and one's feelings about and interpretations of it) which the group was meant to accept without judgement. In practice, however, the testimony was subject to 'cross examination' and scrutinized for evidence of 'resistance' to radical

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\(^{50}\) The questions already presumed a certain interpretation of experience, for instance, that women are sex objects (Anon, 'Consciousness Raising', in Tanner (ed.), op.cit., pp.253-254). Freeman, op.cit., p.116, also talks about the consciousness raising experience as being a resocialization to 'correct consciousness'.

feminist consciousness. Upon its revelation, women's 'faulty' thinking could be corrected. The possession of a 'true' radical feminist consciousness was in turn one of the conditions for the development of vanguardism.\textsuperscript{52}

The claim that radical feminist consciousness represented the 'truth' about women rests on Enlightenment notions of the possibility of transcendent truth, even as this 'truth' is figured as an unproblematized women's 'experience' and is manifestly formulated on Marxist principles.\textsuperscript{53} The impulse to transcendence in radical feminism is evidenced in claims that, through consciousness-raising, one can reach a 'free space' from where the totality of women's condition can be seen. Those who have attained a radical feminist consciousness are, on this conception, in a position to claim status as 'truth-sayers'. Distinctions could be drawn between those who possessed the truth and those who did not; between those who had been through consciousness-raising and those who had not. The difference, according to one writer, could be discerned by behaviour. Those who had been through consciousness-raising no longer behaved according to the male patterns of ordering people around, trying to control and manipulate others, criticizing and putting other people down, she claimed.\textsuperscript{54} Yet, ironically, these were precisely the behaviours evinced by those who believed they held the truth and, most particularly, by the self-proclaimed vanguard.

In terms of the feminist revolution, the problem confronting radical feminist role theory was that if, as Millett claimed, women are so indoctrinated that their compliance to patriarchy is assured, how can there be any feminists? How is change possible if women can not even see the necessity for revolt? Exponents of the 'coercion' thesis, Firestone and Redstockings for instance, rejected the idea that women were

\textsuperscript{52} This 'resistance' took the form of maintaining a false state of consciousness which was diagnosable through the symptoms of male-identification, resistance to woman-identification, seeking personal solutions to political problems, individualism instead of collectivism, claiming women and men were already equal and therefore not seeing the need for revolution. Resistance to the truth ('how to avoid facing the awful truth') was usually explained through various valid or invalid fears. See I. Peshkis, 'Resistances to Consciousness', in Tanner (ed.), op.cit., pp.233-235; Sarachild, op.cit., pp.154-156; Echols, op.cit., pp.88-90,235.

\textsuperscript{53} As many commentators have noted, the idea that 'experience' is immediately accessible to the conscious mind, and can be understood and named, is anchored in Western philosophical discourse's notion of the individual, sovereign subject. See, for instance, J. W. Scott, 'Experience', in Butler and Scott (eds), op.cit., pp.22-40.

\textsuperscript{54} Arnold, op.cit., p.161; Allen, op.cit., pp.277-278.
'brainwashed' and therefore in need of a vanguard party. Millett herself cited a long history of feminist political organizing to show that women have never been brought completely under the control of men, despite all attempts at conditioning and coercion. But with no inherent conception of resistive agency, the conditioning thesis suggested the necessity for external intervention to break the spell of patriarchal mystification and set women on the revolutionary path. The more militant radical feminist celibate groups, The Feminists and Cell 16 for example, claimed for themselves the status of the vanguard party.

Vanguardism, at least within radical and lesbian feminism, takes the form of separatism. Given the conceptual opposition of 'truth' to power within traditional Western philosophy, only from a transcendent place 'outside' personal interest and power relations (relations with men) could the truth be proclaimed. Atkinson's, Cell 16's and The Feminists' claim that sexual relations were fundamentally oppressive to women led to their advocacy of sexual separation from men. The more general argument for separatism in the context of feminist politics, however, was that women needed to temporarily separate from men in order to re-evaluate their lives, re-define themselves and build solidarity with other women. Accordingly, by 1970, all-women communes were appearing in the U.S.

Separatism, as a concept and strategy closely aligned to sex-role theory, is, as Alison Jaggar notes, clearly located within the Enlightenment tradition. Role theory, resting on the conceptual separation of the abstract individual and society, posits the possibility that human beings are capable, in principle, of withdrawing from society to redefine their own identity and destiny. On this model, the identity imposed by society can be simply thrown aside leaving the individual free to remake themselves.

55 Redstockings, 'Manifesto', p.333; Brownmiller, 'Sisterhood Is Powerful', p.150; Echols, op.cit., pp.144,171. They also rejected the idea that women had to be changed or re-conditioned/re-educated: it was men's behaviour that was problematic and needed changing.
56 Echols, op.cit., pp.159-159,175,186,192.
58 Jaggar, op.cit., p.86.
Separatism and role theory's assumption that power is in a relation of exteriority to the subject and the truth obscured radical feminist's exercise of normative power through their own 'true' discourses. Radical feminism's deployment of sexual liberationism, in its own 'repressive hypothesis', further consolidated the 'juridico-discursive' model of power operating within radical feminist discourses.

The repressive hypothesis in radical feminism.

Radical feminists, except for Atkinson and members of The Feminists and Cell 16, generally embraced the sexual liberation thesis. Millett and Firestone looked forward to sexual liberation upon the liberation of women. Given the expectation that women's liberation would restore the androgyny which purportedly lay at the heart of human experience, it followed that sexuality, liberated from patriarchal constraints, would be similarly polymorphous in expression. Millett imagined sexual liberation would see a lifting of the taboo on homosexuality and Firestone, drawing on Freudo-Marxism, posited the restoration of a polymorphous perversity, replacing the categories of hetero-, homo- and bi- sexuality. At the same time, radical feminists were concerned about the erroneous nature of much male science of female sexuality, a situation which, for Millett, was only beginning to be rectified through work such as Masters and Johnson's. Male definitions of normal female sexuality, as in the notion of the 'vaginal orgasm', were now seen by radical feminists as patriarchal ideology which served to keep women in their secondary place.59

The radical feminist attack on Freud, via a critique of the vaginal orgasm, was elaborated in essays by Anne Koedt and Susan Lydon.60 Starting from sexology's much-touted 'problem' of female sexual 'frigidity', Koedt and Lydon refigured 'frigidity' as women's sexual dissatisfaction, a condition engendered by patriarchy in the service of male domination. Drawing on Masters and Johnson, Koedt and Lydon argued that women's

59 Firestone, op.cit., pp.19,193,195; Millett, op.cit., pp.82,117-118,136. 'Free' sexuality, according to Firestone, was also non-monogamous, though Millett's position was that voluntary association would replace marriage.

clitorally-based sexual pleasure had been denied and repressed for the sake of both men's pleasure and of women's subjugation. Freud was singled out for perpetrating the biggest 'lie' about female sexuality - the myth of the vaginal orgasm. To Koedt and Lydon, this myth - that the vagina is the site of mature female sexual response and orgasm - serves men's interests. It justified organizing sex around men's needs and led women to believe that their sexual pleasure depended on a penis and vaginal intercourse.

Citing Kinsey, and Masters and Johnson, Koedt and Lydon argued that new scientific research showed women were indeed the sexual equals of men, perhaps even superior in sexual capacity and orgasmic potential. The 'discovery' of the clitoris as the site of female sexuality and its centrality to female orgasm enabled Koedt to posit the idea of an autonomous female sexuality. Koedt's formulation also explicitly opened the way for the acceptance of lesbianism as a legitimate form of sexual fulfilment for women. It followed that, if the clitoris is the site of female sexual pleasure, then the male organ and men are superfluous. In Koedt's view, there was an 'anatomical' reason and justification for lesbianism.

The project of liberating a specifically female sexuality, as elaborated by Koedt and Lydon, contradicted that of the liberation of an androgynous bisexuality (promoted by gender role theorists like Millett) and the liberation of a 'polymorphous perversity' (promoted by more Freudian accounts like Firestone's). As in the case of the conflicting conceptions of the sexuality to be liberated by gay liberation (homosexual or polymorphous), these conflicting conceptions of the nature of female sexuality to be liberated by feminism produced a tension within radical and lesbian feminism that would in part be resolved by a strategic shift to essential sexual difference, a discussion to which I return in Chapter 4.

So far in this Chapter I have identified the major problematics of Western philosophy salient to this thesis and have indicated some of their effects in the earliest formulations of radical feminism. The compulsion to produce a singular truth compelled the production of a radical feminist 'master narrative' which problematically claimed to
account for all women's experience and simultaneously promoted radical feminism as the liberators of all women. The constitutive discourses of radical feminism made possible the formulation of a plausible political project and enabled the construction of new, 'liberated' subject positions for women. But they also promoted profoundly anti-female analyses and political prescriptions, as in the negative valuation and overcoming of women's sexed embodiment.

In the next section, I explore how the problematic status of women in relation to the 'human' in Western philosophy created the possibility for the claim that the 'truly human' woman was a lesbian. This variation on the theme of 'lesbian' as 'not-woman', along with other claims for lesbian privilege, produced what seemed at the time to be a compelling argument for political lesbianism and lesbian vanguardism. The next section, therefore, highlights the discursive moves through which lesbian supremacy and a lesbian feminist 'regime of truth' on sexuality was established.

III. THE ASCENDENCE OF LESBIAN FEMINISM

Lesbian feminism, as a movement and a body of thought, constitutes itself at the intersection of radical feminism and gay liberation. Given its adherence to radical feminism's founding principle - that gender oppression is the primary and determining oppression - lesbian feminism similarly reduces sexuality to an effect of patriarchy. At the same time, however, the suppression of lesbianism is taken to be a condition of patriarchy. Hence, the possibility arises of understanding heterosexuality to be the form that male domination primarily takes. In this section I explore this linkage of gender and sexuality, of feminism and lesbianism, as well as other key formulations of lesbian feminism as articulated by American writers in the late 1960s and early 1970s - Rita Mae Brown, Charlotte Bunch and Martha Shelley - and by the groups they founded: Radicalesbians and The Furies.61 I also show how a project of political

61 These ideas were elaborated in the British context by The Leeds Revolutionary Feminist Group, in Love Your Enemy? The Debate Between Heterosexual Feminism and Political Lesbianism, London, Onlywoman Press, 1981. In Australia, lesbian feminism at the theoretical level has been articulated most prominently by writers such as Denise Thompson and in the Journal of Australian Lesbian Feminist Studies. See, for example, Reading Between the Lines, A Lesbian Feminist Critique of Feminist Accounts of Sexuality, Sydney, The Gorgon's Head Press, 1991. Monique Wittig has been the major exponent of lesbian feminism in France and more lately in the U.S. See Wittig, op.cit.
lesbianism and lesbian vanguardism could be elaborated through Enlightenment figurations of power, truth and self, the possibility of transcendent knowledge and freedom, the problematic status of women in relation to 'the human', and a repressive hypothesis of lesbian sexuality.

The lesbian feminist critique of heterosexuality

Lesbian feminism, working from the radical feminist axiom 'the personal is political', constituted its project through the problematization of sexuality, particularly heterosexuality: "[lesbian-feminist politics] is an extension of the analysis of sexual politics to an analysis of sexuality itself as an institution".\(^{62}\) Heterosexuality, as both an institution and ideology, comprises, for lesbian feminists, one of the cornerstones (if not the cornerstone) of male supremacy. Within heterosexuality and its adjunct institutions of marriage and the family, women are defined as the property of men, and their role is to provide sexual and other service to men. According to lesbian feminists, 'heterosexism' provides ideological support to patriarchy through the proposition that heterosexuality is the 'natural' and superior form of sexuality. This ideology works to divide women politically and personally by attaching them to individual men. In achieving this, lesbian feminists claim, the institution of heterosexuality obstructs feminist organizing. At the same time, heterosexism works to institute a regime of heterosexual domination which oppresses homosexuals. Heterosexism and male supremacy are, then, to lesbian feminists, the common links in both women's oppression and homosexual oppression. Constituting these links in this way, lesbian feminists could then claim that gay liberation and women's liberation are coextensive, that heterosexual women must fight heterosexism as part of destroying male supremacy, and that gay men must fight patriarchy to secure their own liberation.\(^{63}\)

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\(^{62}\) Bunch, 'Not for Lesbians Only', p.51.

\(^{63}\) ibid., pp.52-54; Bunch, 'Learning from Lesbian Separatism', pp.438,441; Brown, A Plain Brown Rapper, p.111.
Lesbianism as a feminist political issue

The characterization of heterosexuality as a compulsory institution of patriarchy enabled a repressive hypothesis of lesbian sexuality to be brought into play. This lesbian feminist repressive hypothesis consists of the claim that the condition of patriarchy is the repression of lesbianism. As Adrienne Rich later put it, the fact that heterosexuality has to be "imposed, managed organized, propagated, and maintained by force" suggests it is not a 'natural' sexual preference. Further, such intervention indicates there is an enormous potential counterforce that the institution of compulsory heterosexuality has to restrain. This threatening counterforce, to lesbian feminists like Rich, is lesbianism.

According to lesbian feminists, the threat lesbianism poses to patriarchy consists of the suggestion that women can exist outside of the strictures of compulsory heterosexuality and outside the domination and control of individual men. Lesbianism, to lesbian feminists, also represents a model egalitarian relationship between equals and the possibility of a life determined by women for their own and other women's benefit, not men's. Lesbians are living proof of the potential for independent, self-determined female existence outside male definitions and control. And, because of its capacity to unite women in solidarity against men, forging a 'woman-identified' and woman-oriented life through lesbianism constitutes a political threat to patriarchy. In this sense, Brown claimed, "lesbianism, politically organized, is the greatest threat that exists to male supremacy".

Through the argument that the patriarchal social order is secured through compulsory heterosexuality and the suppression of lesbianism, lesbian feminists could claim that lesbianism was not merely a sexual practice but a political stance. In doing this, lesbian feminists effectively countered radical feminists' claims that lesbianism was either irrelevant


to women's liberation or merely represented a 'personal solution' to male domination. The pathologization of lesbianism and the 'lesbian-baiting' of the women's movement could now be understood to be a patriarchal tactic, enforcing compliance with the female sex role and discouraging women's collective organizing.

Lesbianism's new status as a political issue, through occupying a central position to all women's oppression, was articulated in Bunch's claim that "no woman is truly free to be anything until she is also free to be a lesbian". Statements like these worked to extend lesbians' claims to political status within feminism into claims of the universal liberatory potential of lesbianism. It followed that, if all women became lesbians, the political threat that lesbianism posed to patriarchy would be realized. It was not long before lesbian feminists developed an argument which contained a claim that all feminists must make a political choice to become a lesbian.

**Beyond patriarchy - political lesbianism**

The term 'political lesbianism' refers to a purposeful, conscious choice to strategically position oneself as a 'lesbian' so as to bring an end to patriarchy. In its earliest elaboration in the Radicalettes' paper 'The Woman Identified Woman', political lesbianism was formulated through the concept of 'woman identification'. To be a 'woman identified woman', for the Radicalettes, was to experience a primary emotional commitment and affiliation to other women without necessarily engaging in lesbian sex. Woman identification also held out the promise of a new, liberated mode of life, determined by women, in which women could create a new sense of self by drawing strength, support and direction from other women. Most importantly, to the Radicalettes, woman-identification, in its capacity to cut across class and race barriers

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68 The 'personal solution' of lesbianism, for radical feminists, consisted of abandoning the struggle with the class-enemy, men, whether in the public realm or in the private realm, as in the bedroom. Roxanne Dunbar of Cell 16 was one radical feminist who made claims like these, to which Rita Mae Brown responded at length. Dunbar also claimed that, because lesbianism is a 'chosen' oppression, unlike race, class or sex oppression, it is therefore an 'inauthentic' oppression. See Dunbar and Leghom, op.cit., p.315; Brown, A Plain Brown Rapper, pp.119-128.


70 Bunch, 'Learning from Lesbian Separatism', p.442
between women, comprised the basis of women's solidarity against patriarchy.\textsuperscript{71}

The strategic value of the Radicalesbians conception of lesbianism as woman-identification lay in its suggestion that any woman could be a lesbian. However, most writers insisted that woman identification implied lesbian sex. The Radicalesbians themselves argued that, until women saw in each other the possibility of a primal commitment that includes sexual love, they would be denying themselves the love and value they readily accord to men. Without this primary commitment to their own kind, the Radicalesbians argued, women would affirm their second class status.\textsuperscript{72}

Given the insistence that woman-identification implied lesbian sex, it was necessary to figure lesbianism as a possibility for all women. Accordingly, lesbian feminists claimed that all women had the potential to be lesbians, but that its realization was inhibited in patriarchal culture.\textsuperscript{73} The arguments mobilized to invite women to break the taboo on lesbianism and take up this liberated lesbian subject position ranged from outlining the merits of lesbianism to outright coercion in the name of women's liberation.

In the mildest exhortations of its proponents, lesbianism offered the promise of overcoming the most debilitating effects of patriarchy on women - low self esteem, poor self confidence and crippling passivity - and to release women from the grinding daily struggle with men. Lesbian feminists claimed that lesbianism was an act of self-affirmation, through which women could learn to love themselves through loving another woman.\textsuperscript{74} Brown, for instance claimed that, "to sleep with another woman is to confront the beauty and power of your own body as well as hers".\textsuperscript{75} In another example, through interviewing lesbians on a community radio


\textsuperscript{72} Radicalesbians, 'The Woman Identified Woman', p.18.


\textsuperscript{74} Bunch, 'Learning from Lesbian Separatism', p.436; Melbourne Gay Women's Group, op.cit., p.445; Brown, A Plain Brown Rapper, pp.112-113,188.

\textsuperscript{75} Brown, A Plain Brown Rapper, p.32.
station, one heterosexual woman suddenly saw that loving another woman could lead women to overcome their belief (derived from patriarchal ideology) that their bodies and sexual parts were ugly and dirty. For this reason alone, she claimed, lesbianism "was a good political decision to make".  

Given the broader cultural context of the time, in which the sexual revolution promised health, happiness and liberation, the claim that lesbian sex was superior and that women made better lovers than men had much theoretical force. Without the presence of constraining patriarchal sex-roles, Brown argued, lesbianism was a way to reclaim women's self-knowledge and sexual power, a sign of which was the particular capacity of lesbians to experience multiple orgasms. Reclaiming this power was also linked to reclaiming aggression, she added. Through lesbianism, Brown argued, women throw off submissive body gestures and behaviours, develop more self assurance and more powerful bodies. Lesbianism enables women to project themselves more forcefully and take up more space in the world. 

The more coercive arguments for lesbianism began with claims, such as Shelley's, that a woman's inability to love another woman alienated her from other women and obstructed the development of female solidarity. Shelley also posed the question: "Isn't love between equals healthier than sucking up to an oppressor?" Brown was more forthright, stating that "lesbianism is a necessary step in the struggle for liberation." Committing oneself to women, which included physical love, for Brown, was a sign that one really cared about women's liberation. In her typically confrontationist style, Brown asked:

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76 Rainone, Shelley, Hart, op.cit., p.356.  
78 Brown, A Plain Brown Rapper, p.189.  
79 Ibid., pp.186,188-189.  
81 Shelley, 'Notes of a Radical Lesbian', p.309.  
82 Brown, A Plain Brown Rapper, p.112.
if you don't feel other women are worthy of your total commitment - love, energy, sex, all of it - then aren't you really saying that women aren't really worth fighting for? If you reserve those 'special' commitments for men then aren't you telling other women that they aren't worth those commitments, they aren't important? 83

The claim that "heterosexuality means men first" 84 led increasingly to a demand that women show their commitment to feminism by becoming lesbians. 85 By 1972, these demands were being asserted with increasing confidence. The Furies, for example, stated "lesbianism is not a matter of sexual preference but rather one of political choice which every woman must make if she is to become woman identified and thereby end male supremacy." 86

Feminists' continued commitment to heterosexuality in the face of these calls to political lesbianism could only be construed by lesbian feminists as a failure of loyalty and a lack of commitment to feminism. Lesbian feminists claimed that the women's movement was being betrayed by heterosexual feminists' refusal to renounce heterosexual privilege. For Bunch, those privileges (legitimacy, economic security, social acceptance, legal and physical protection, for example), while working against women's self-interest, nevertheless gave them a stake in their own oppression. 87 While she did not claim that all feminists must become lesbian, Bunch nevertheless argued that "heterosexual privilege is a small and short term bribe in return for giving up lasting self-discovery and collective power." 88

83 Ibid., p.110.
84 Bunch, 'Not for Lesbians Only', p.52.
85 See, for example, Gutter Dyke Collective, 'Over the Walls, Separatism', in Hoagland and Penelope (eds), op.cit., p.26 (article originally published in 1973); Alice, Gordon, Debbie and Mary, 'Separatism', p.31.
Brown, again, was less equivocating. She claimed that to give a man support and love before giving it to a sister is to support a system and culture that is violently anti-women. Lesbians, having withdrawn their energy and support from men, and thereby their stake in patriarchy, were therefore, to Brown, truly serious about women's liberation. As she put it:

You can't build a women's movement if women are tied to their oppressors - individually and ideologically. Holding onto male values and privileges granted to women for heterosexuality (which insures that each man will have his slave) subverts the women's movement. You cannot build a women's movement if you don't commit yourselves to women, totally. Heterosexual women are still committed to men.

The newly emerging lesbian feminist identity, forged against compulsory heterosexuality, was, then, increasingly forged against heterosexual feminists. Heterosexual feminists, too, along with men, could be construed as 'the enemy'. Bisexual feminists fared no better. As 'wanting to have their cake and eat it too', bisexuals' continued 'collusion' with 'the enemy' was understood to oppress lesbians. Refusing to make "the hard choice", straight and bisexual feminists have no place in "the woman world, the dyke world".

Lesbian feminism's innovation, its 'exceeding' of the terms of sexology's pathologized category of 'lesbian', was not only to promote lesbianism as positive sexuality but also to refigure it as a feminist political positioning that any woman could (and should) inhabit. 'Lesbian' no longer simply signified a form of sexual behaviour but was rather a political identity signifying solidarity with other women in the sex-class war against men.

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89 Brown, A Plain Brown Rapper, pp.80,111,125.
90 Ibid., p.124.
Through lesbian feminists' rendering of lesbianism as 'woman-identification', lesbians were no longer seen as different to 'normal' (heterosexual) women by virtue of a pathology intrinsic to them. Yet emerging claims that lesbians constituted the feminist vanguard rested precisely on nineteenth century notions of 'the lesbian' as 'not-woman'. Lesbian feminism's formulation of the lesbian as not-woman did not proceed through the trope of masculinized 'gender inversion', however. Indeed, lesbian feminists explicitly disavowed the characterization of lesbianism as 'male-identification'. Rather, the lesbian feminist as 'not-woman' referred to a refusal of patriarchal femininity. But, as I show in the next section, lesbian vanguardism nevertheless partly rested on claims that the lesbian represented the (implicitly male) 'human' form of 'woman'.

The lesbian vanguard

Lesbian feminists' characterization of heterosexual and bisexual women as utterly compromised by their implication in patriarchal power relations led to claims that only lesbians could be serious feminists. Further, through claims made for lesbianism - lesbianism as a state of natural revolt against male supremacy and the constraints of the female role; lesbians as 'self chosen' women who refuse to obey (given the valency of 'choice' as the marker of freedom); lesbians as the only women who effectively challenge patriarchy; lesbians being freer to act against male supremacy because they are not tied to a man and have no stake or place in patriarchal society and so on - lesbians were figured as the natural constituency of the feminist vanguard.93

One of the most compelling arguments for lesbian vanguardism, however, was elaborated through an answer to the question: if conditioning to the female gender role and heterosexuality is a standard operation applied to all females in a patriarchal social order, how is lesbianism possible? It followed that the lesbian had somehow escaped attempts at patriarchal conditioning. Besides an explanation that

lesbians' 'escape' from conditioning rested on their conscious or unconscious resistance to patriarchy from childhood, another answer suggests that lesbians saw through patriarchy's attempts to condition them. As therefore 'already enlightened', lesbians could claim to possess a privileged insight into the workings of patriarchy.

The view that lesbians were somehow already enlightened was promoted through statements like "I have never met a lesbian . . . who swallowed one word of the 'women's role' horseshit". Lesbians asserted their concomitant vanguard status through claims that "we rejected men and sex roles long before there even was a women's liberation movement". Heterosexual women were exhorted to:

remember, WE long before YOU have known discontent with male society and WE long before YOU knew and appreciated the full potential of everything female . . . It is WE who say welcome to you, long blind and oppressed sisters, we have been fighting against male supremacy for a long time, join US.

The lesbian's resistance to patriarchal conditioning could also be construed to rest on a humanist impulse, manifesting in an "accordance with her inner compulsion to be a more complete and freer human being than her society . . . cares to allow her". That the lesbian had somehow avoided conditioning to femininity therefore also attested to her greater closeness to her native humanity or human 'essence'. Given the association of 'male' with 'human', alluded to throughout this chapter, it is not surprising that arguments for the lesbian's 'humanity' deploys masculinist values. In addition to being an active, choosing, self-conscious agent by virtue of her resistance to patriarchal conditioning to femininity, the lesbian is also described by lesbian feminists as autonomous and self-determining (ironically, being ostensibly free from 'male' definitions), independent (free of male dependence financially,

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95 Shelley, 'Notes of a Radical Lesbian', p.308.
96 Koedt, 'Lesbianism and Feminism', p.248.
97 Ibid., p.250.
emotionally and sexually) and responsible (for she must make all decisions for herself). The lesbian, therefore, is already the equal of men. As Martha Shelley remarked, "I have never met a lesbian who believed that she was innately less rational or capable than a man".  

Constituting the lesbian as the 'human' form of 'woman' introduced the inescapable corollary that women's condition under patriarchy was 'inhuman'. Hence, Radicalesbians could claim that "woman and person are contradictory terms".  

Again, the emerging identity of the lesbian feminist was being constructed at the cost of its heterosexual 'other'. The lesbian, as an active, choosing, self-conscious political agent only made sense through its oppositional relation to the passive, mystified, conditioned female subject of role theory. For lesbian feminists, the conditioned woman, the heterosexual woman in the traditional role, was an 'empty vessel'. Alienated from her true self, any satisfaction she experienced in her role as a wife and mother was due to a surrogate pleasure derived from proximity to a man's ego, achievement and status.

This theme of alienation and dehumanization also suggested 'sickness' as a metaphor for the condition of women in a patriarchal social order. Shelley, for instance, argued that, if patriarchal society itself was a sick society, then the female role also was sick and made women sick. It followed that to be deviant was a sign of wellness. Shelley turned the verities of traditional psychiatry on their head by arguing that, if it is true that lesbianism arises from a hostility to men, then, in a society where men oppress women, lesbianism is a sign of mental health.

In this inversion of psychological verities, female rage and hostility towards men was understood as a rational, healthy response to patriarchy and a sign of nascent feminist consciousness. Anger accompanied the insight that women's real feelings and real needs were suppressed by conditioning to patriarchal femininity. Rage arose from a

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99 Shelley, 'Notes of a Radical Lesbian', p.308.
102 Shelley, 'Notes of a Radical Lesbian', p.306.
recognition of the injustice of women's confinement to a sex role which denied her humanity. Anger and rage, then, were signs of a dawning 'truth' about women's condition in a patriarchal society and, therefore, of proximity to one's 'true' (unconditioned) feelings.\footnote{See, for instance, Berson, op.cit., pp.24-27.}

Anger was the condition for feminist political action. Public displays of anger in demonstrations and zap actions saw the generation of the stereotype of feminists as man-hating lesbians, an assignation which lesbian feminists did not necessarily discourage.\footnote{Gutter Dyke Collective, "This is the Year to Stamp Out the "Y" Chromosome", in Hoegland and Penelope (eds), op.cit., p.338 (article originally published in 1973). The collective proudly claimed to be angry man-hating dykes in view of the danger men posed to women and the planet.} Indeed, as the Radicalesbians put it: "a lesbian is the rage of all women condensed to the point of explosion".\footnote{Radicalesbians, 'The Woman Identified Woman', p.17.} It was the lesbian, then, who was to proudly bear the burdens and insignia of the feminist vanguard.

Given their depictions of the conditioned woman, lesbian feminists' assertions that no woman in a traditional role could like or respect herself are not surprising. For the Radicalesbians,\footnote{Ibid., pp.20-21.} the traditional woman's role, which implicitly accepted the negative value of women, led to self hatred. This manifested as unease, restlessness, anxiety or even a shrill defence of the glory of the female role, they claimed. The traditional woman nevertheless possessed a latent consciousness of her true condition. She recognised at a deep level that she was alienated from her humanity and out of touch with her true feelings. To the Radicalesbians, therefore, all women were potentially revolutionary subjects.

What, then, could awaken them? As the Radicalesbians saw it, a conditioned woman is forced into a confrontation with the stark horror of her dehumanised situation once the source of her identity (men) was removed, through the breakup of their marriage for instance. Lesbianism also threatened to expose heterosexual women's 'true' condition. What stands in the way of the heterosexual woman's potential for lesbianism, then, is the fear of self confrontation that would force them to recognize the awful truth of their condition. Lesbianism, to the Radicalesbians,
could bring heterosexual women to an enlightened state, a revolutionary consciousness.

Lesbian feminists' claims to vanguardism on the grounds that the lesbian constituted the 'human' form of woman was undercut, however, by the very theory deployed to make that claim. In keeping with role theory and its conditioning thesis, lesbian feminists had also to concede that the category 'lesbian', like that of 'woman', 'man' and 'heterosexual', was a false creation of patriarchy. Lesbian feminist role theorists accorded to role theory's logical conclusion that, in a future society where men do not oppress women, the categories 'homosexual' and 'heterosexual', like 'man' and 'woman', would simply disappear. If role theory posited 'authentic' human subjectivity to be androgynous, then it followed that bisexuality would be the sexual norm in a post-patriarchal society. It was expected that individuals would be attracted to each other as 'people', not as sexes and sexualities.\[107\]

In the face of such a compelling argument against lesbianism as itself an end of the feminist revolution, some lesbian feminists asserted that lesbianism could instead be regarded as a means to it. Lesbianism, they claimed, offered a means to access all women's natural polymorphous or bisexuality. As a member of Radicalesbians said by way of encouraging women to try it, one of the ways that women may be liberated from their restrictive gender roles and the patriarchal heterosexual norm was to accept their potential for lesbianism.\[108\]

Like gay liberation and radical feminism, in deploying role theory and its androgynous ('human') subject at the same time as promoting lesbian liberation, lesbian feminism, too, promoted conflicting conceptions of the sexuality to be liberated. The assertion of lesbian identity was seen by heterosexual radical feminists as divisive within the dominant sensibility of an androgynous, bisexual 'same'. Lesbians who promoted gender role theory were faced with the paradoxical proposition that, upon liberation, they would be no more. The tension between lesbian liberation and a humanist (androgyny) project which promised the demise of the lesbian


\[108\] Rainone, Shelley, Hart, op.cit., p.357.
was, as I show in the next chapter, resolved by the strategic shift to 'difference'. In the meantime, lesbian feminists' claims that lesbians were feminists *par excellence* and that all feminists had an obligation to become lesbian were generating resistance from within radical feminism.

**Radical feminists' resistance to political lesbianism**

Lesbian feminism constituted itself as a privileged feminism through 'de-humanizing' and pathologizing heterosexual and bisexual feminists. But lesbian feminists' exercise of power over other feminists through producing a discourse of 'true' feminism created its own resistances. Atkinson, for example, countered the promotion of lesbian vanguardism through redefining lesbianism as a sexual activity. Because all sexual activity under patriarchal conditions was, to Atkinson, fundamentally oppressive to women, she did not believe feminists could not take comfort in lesbianism. As far as she was concerned, lesbianism, as a sexual relationship was equally oppressive to women:

Because lesbianism involves role-playing and, more important, because it is based on the primary assumption of male oppression, that is, sex, lesbianism reinforces the sex class system.\(^{109}\)

Despite their status as a 'false category' created by patriarchy, Atkinson however granted that lesbians, as rejecting the female role, were not entirely within the sex class 'woman'. While, to Atkinson, lesbians therefore experienced more power, independence and freedom than heterosexual women, she saw them as only a potential source of revolutionary feminist leadership. Atkinson's discussion suggests that, in order to join the feminist vanguard (as she defined it), lesbians must subsume their struggle under that of the radical feminist struggle against male domination. Presumably, one of Atkinson's conditions for lesbian revolutionary subjectivity would be for them to give up sex.\(^{110}\)

\(^{109}\) Atkinson, *Amazon Odyssey*, p.86. This is also Koedt's position. See *Lesbianism and Feminism*, pp.249-251.

\(^{110}\) Atkinson, *Amazon Odyssey*, pp.133,137-139.
Koedt similarly argued that the fight against sexism must come first; that the oppression of homosexuals, as a subsidiary effect of sexism, would disappear upon the liberation of women. For her, lesbianism was radical only insofar as lesbians were also working politically to destroy the institutions of sexism. As a heterosexual feminist, Koedt took particular offence at the claim that to be a revolutionary feminist it was enough simply to be a lesbian. Rejecting lesbian feminists' dividing practices of 'true' and 'false' feminists, Koedt retorted that heterosexual women, too, defied their gender roles and fought against women's oppression. Further, Koedt claimed that lesbian feminists' prescriptions on and judgement of other feminists' sexual life represented a perversion of the principle 'the personal is the political' and violated the right of personal choice. However, in reasserting a public/private distinction through the tactic of redrawing the political line at the bedroom door, Koedt's defensive move ironically undercut radical feminists' own characterization of sexuality as a political institution of patriarchy.\footnote{Koedt, 'Lesbianism and Feminism', pp.250-251,255-257.}

Despite these protests and rebuttals, heterosexual feminists could not then, and have not since, been able to articulate an effective counter-discourse within the terms of radical feminism.\footnote{Echols, op.cit., pp.239-240; D. English, A. Hollibaugh and G. Rubin, 'Talking Sex: A Conversation of Sexuality and Feminism', Feminist Review, No.11, June 1982, pp.42-44. See also Morgan, Going Too Far, pp.175-178 for her 1973 account of negotiating the category 'lesbian', and the disciplinary effects of that exercise of categorization. On the silencing of heterosexual feminists in Britain in the context of the ascendency of the discourse of political lesbianism, see Segal, op.cit., pp.87-88; Campbell, op.cit., p.38; Ardill and O'Sullivan, op.cit., p.234.} Instead, as I have shown in this chapter, the epistemological foundations of radical and lesbian feminism enabled the articulation of a discourse in which lesbians occupied, and still occupy, a privileged feminist speaking position.

The possibility of figuring the lesbian as 'outside' patriarchy, and therefore as possessed of a privileged feminist consciousness, is an effect of the discursive conditions for the elaboration of radical and lesbian feminism: the epistemological frameworks of traditional Western philosophy. Deploying a repressive hypothesis, lesbian feminists also claimed that the repression of lesbianism was the condition of patriarchy. This led to further claims that the liberation of lesbians would bring the liberation of all women, and that all feminists should make the political choice to become lesbians. Through the vagaries of radical feminist role
theory and its conditioning thesis, it was also possible to assert that the lesbian was the already-enlightened, truly 'human' form of woman and, hence, that lesbians were the natural constituents of the feminist vanguard.

This hierarchical ordering of subject positions did not stop at the ranking of heterosexuals, bisexuals and lesbians, however. In the next chapter I explore how lesbian supremacy was sustained through the emerging discourses of sexual difference, and how the discourses of sexual difference themselves created the conditions of possibility for the constitution of the 'true' lesbian feminist.
CHAPTER 4

CULTURAL FEMINISM AND THE 'TRUE' LESBIAN

Early radical and lesbian feminism, as I have shown in Chapter 3, are clearly located in the Enlightenment and humanist traditions of Western philosophy through their conceptual dependence on Marxism and liberalism. Drawing on both these political discourses, the radical and lesbian feminist movements constructed a liberatory political project. The constitutive phallocentrism of radical and lesbian feminist discourses, however, produced highly problematic effects: most notably women's uncertain status as 'fully human' and the disavowal of sexed embodiment. In certain elaborations of radical feminism, these implicit conceptual commitments led to the proposition that women must overcome their sexed embodiment (most problematically, their reproductive function) in order to be men's equals.

Radical and lesbian feminism's 'phallocentrism' produced further problems. The principle of identity (A=A) underpinned the deployment of bisexual androgyny to represent the human condition in a state of nature prior to patriarchal cultural inscription. Through the androgyny thesis, and the principle of identity, feminists hoped to reclaim their 'natural' equality to men. This humanist impulse, however, conflicted with both the women's and gay movement's project of liberating women qua women, and homosexuals qua homosexuals. A project that promised the dispersal of 'men' and 'women' into androgynous 'humans', and homosexual desire into the polymorphous perverse could not generate positive, specific identities around which a liberatory politics could be organized. Most importantly, perhaps, the homogenizing impulse of humanist androgyny did not accord with individuals' lived experience of self, or of differences of class, race, gender and sexuality.

When taken as the means to women's liberation as well as its end, the androgyny thesis compelled the production of an androgynous, bisexual/polymorphous self. As a personal project, androgynization of the self soon stalled. Trainings in gender roles and heterosexuality were proving more difficult to undo than conditioning theory had predicted. Similarly, lesbian feminists' claims that lesbianism was a political choice
that all feminists should make did not accord with many women's experience of sexual desire as 'intransigent' and fixed. The bisexual prescription often degenerated into an argument over who should go bisexual first, with lesbian feminists asserting that, as already engaging in a revolutionary sexual practice, they would remain homosexual until all heterosexuals became gay. As I show in this chapter, the tension between these different conceptions of the sexuality to be liberated was resolved by the promotion of 'essential' female or lesbian sexualities.

The growing scepticism towards androgyne built on pre-existing radical feminist critiques of the suggestion, implicit in role theory, that men and women were equally oppressed by sex-role differentiation. Such characterizations of the condition of men under patriarchy did not accord with radical feminists' analysis of the structural relations of power between men and women. The problems raised by the androgyne project also prompted suspicions amongst some radical and lesbian feminists that the whole idea of an androgynous human nature was itself a patriarchal ideology of "human being-ism". For these sceptics, the androgyne thesis obscured the fact of male and female difference, and of men’s culpability for women's oppressed condition. 'Egalitarian' feminists were, accordingly, increasingly characterized by these writers as promoting a struggle for a "false state of equality" with men.

A final element in the emerging crisis in early radical and lesbian feminism was, as I noted in Chapter 3, a growing resistance to their universalizing claims. By 1973, in the U.S. at least, class and race differences and the 'gay-straight' split within radical feminism were

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1 Koedl, 'Lesbianism and Feminism', p.282.

2 Such arguments had been in circulation from the outset of radical feminism by those groups who rejected, or were uncomfortable with, role theory. See, for instance, The Feminists, op.cit., p.368; Redstockings, 'Manifesto', p.534; Jaggar, op.cit., pp.86-88. For arguments against role theory that emerged in the context of this crisis, see Alice, Gordon, Debbie and Mary, 'Separatism', p.33; C.L.I.T. Collective, 'C.L.I.T. Statement No.2', pp.360,364.

3 Mary Daly was originally an adherent to role theory and the androgyne thesis. In her autobiography (Outercourse. The Be-Dazzling Voyage, Melbourne, Spinifex Press, 1983, pp.160,203-204), Daly denounced androgyne on the basis that it blinded women to the recognition of their always-already present 'integrity of female being'. She claimed that women, being already whole, didn't need to be 'scotch-taped' together with the male stereotype. See also M. Daly, Gyn/Ecology. The Metaethics of Radical Feminism, Boston, Beacon Press, 1976, xi.

4 See Alice, Gordon, Debbie and Mary, 'Problems of Our Movement', in Hoagland and Penelope (eds), op.cit., pp.380-392 for a full discussion of this concept (article originally published in 1973). See also L. Cowan, 'Separatist Symposium', in Hoagland and Penelope (eds), op.cit., pp.223-224 (article originally published in 1978); Gorgons, 'Response by the Gorgons', in Hoagland and Penelope (eds), op.cit. p.396 (article originally published in 1978).

5 Morgan, Going Too Far, p.187.

6 1973 was the critical year in the U.S. according to Echois, op.cit., pp.11,243. Campbell, op.cit., p.34 dates events in Britain at about the same time. For a fuller discussion, see Echois, Chapter 5. In terms of the gay-straight split within radical feminism, Morgan (Going Too Far, p.170) claims it peaked at the 1973 West Coast Lesbian Feminist Conference in Los Angeles.
unsettling any claims to unity amongst women. It was this climate of conflict and frustration at the stumbling blocks encountered in the feminist project up to that point, then, that precipitated what Moira Gatens has termed "a tactical shift from equality to difference". Emerging from within radical and lesbian feminism in the mid-1970s, one such discourse of sexual difference, 'cultural feminism', soon superseded 'egalitarian' forms of radical and lesbian feminism. 

Building on a strain of radical feminism present (though mostly disavowed) since Valerie Solanas' 1968 *S.C.U.M. (Society for Cutting Up Men) Manifesto*, cultural feminism is characterized by its promotion of essentialist notions of sexual difference - that is, the ascription to men and women of fixed, universal characteristics determined by biology, psychology or 'nature'. As I show in this chapter, however, cultural feminist determinations of male and female difference were conceived through a logic of the 'same'. As a form of radical feminism, cultural feminism revisited the theoretical problematics it sought to overcome in the shift to difference. My concern is to demonstrate the continuity between earlier forms of radical and lesbian feminism and cultural feminism of a totalizing universalism, 'phallocentrism', the problem of difference (installing a new norm of 'natural woman') and problematic suppositions about truth, power and the self. I track how these ongoing problematics worked out in cultural feminist discourses. In particular, I ask how lesbian supremacy was sustained within cultural feminist discourse and how the construction of male and female difference found an analogue in the constitution of a particular type of lesbian as the 'true' lesbian feminist. These discursive dividing practices, as I show, set the

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6 Gatens, 'A Critique of the Sex/Gender Distinction', p.156.

7 According to Echols, op.cit., p.301, the term 'cultural feminism' was coined in 1975 by a member of Redstockings to describe what radical feminists hostile to the shift to essential sexual difference saw as its depoliticizing effects on the movement. 'Cultural feminism' is most often used by its detractors as a term of disparagement. See Jaggar, op.cit., p.104.


10 This is Elizabeth Grosz's definition. See 'Conclusion: A Note on Essentialism and Difference', in S. Gunew (ed.), *Feminist Knowledge*, London and New York, Routledge, 1990, pp.334-335.

11 The obvious point to make here is that, in the early to mid-1970s in English-speaking countries, Enlightenment/humanist formulations were the major discursive resources in circulation. Anglophone feminist critiques of Western philosophy were not fully developed until the 1980s, nor was French post-structuralism influential in U.S., British and Australian feminist writing until the early 1980s. British socialist feminism, however, was strongly influenced by the Lacanian school of psychoanalysis from the mid-1970s, through the work of writers like Juliet Mitchell.
stage for the debate on lesbian sadomasochism that is the concern of Chapter 5.

I. THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL CONDITIONS OF CULTURAL FEMINISM

The shift to sexual difference and the concurrent reconception of subjectivity, sexuality and the feminist project, identified by the rubric 'cultural feminism', was effected within the existing conceptual framework of radical and lesbian feminism. How a positive female difference could be elaborated through that framework, given the phallocentric nature of Western philosophical discourse, requires some initial explanation.

The A/Not-A relationship of male to female, as I noted in Chapter 3, constitutes an obstacle to conceiving female difference as a positive attribute in relation to maleness. For 'female' to become a positive term within this binary framework, a reversal has to be effected: 'female' must displace male as the primary, valorized 'A' term. The crucial, authorizing element in this displacement was, I believe, the appearance of matriarchist discourses in the early 1970s. The most influential of these was Elizabeth Gould Davis' *The First Sex*.\(^\text{12}\) Drawing on recent archaeological discoveries, mythology, linguistic and anthropological studies, Gould Davis presented a formidable case for the historical existence of matriarchal societies. *The First Sex* had a profound impact on radical feminism: it provided an 'authentic' foundational myth of a 'natural' female-dominated order prior to patriarchy. Armed with such evidence, cultural feminists could confidently invert the value of male/female and constitute 'female' as the primary, determining 'A' term to the detriment of its 'Not-A', that is, the 'male'. The proposition of a female supremacist society was readily accommodated within a logic of identity which conceptually figures difference (from the female) to be the condition of (female) domination.

Assertions of matriarchal authority, found within matriarchist and cultural feminist discourses, required some conceptual adjustment to

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Western philosophy’s association of ‘truth’ with masculine rationality. This reordering was effected through a variety of discursive moves which can be characterized as reversing individual terms of a binary pair so as to upset their traditional relation to individual terms of another pair. The most important exchange, in terms of the discursive conditions for cultural feminism in this regard, was that of shifting the site of truth from its traditional association with science, mind, thought, objectivity, reason and masculinity to the side of nature, the body, the senses, feelings, subjectivity (personal experience) and femininity. The conceptual framework of cultural feminism can be illustrated more clearly through revising the list presented in Chapter 3:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A</th>
<th>Not-A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>self</td>
<td>other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>subject</td>
<td>object</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>female</td>
<td>male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>positive</td>
<td>negative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>human</td>
<td>animal*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nature</td>
<td>culture*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>private</td>
<td>public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>body</td>
<td>mind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>senses/feelings</td>
<td>thought*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>passion/madness</td>
<td>reason</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>truth</td>
<td>falsity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reality</td>
<td>illusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>superstition</td>
<td>science*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>subjectivity</td>
<td>objectivity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>good</td>
<td>evil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>immanence</td>
<td>transcendence*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>birth/death</td>
<td>immortality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>change</td>
<td>permanency</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The binary pairs marked * are, as I show, unstable both in their relation to their positioning as the primary, ‘A’ term (that is, this alignment is open to contestation within cultural feminism) and in relation to each other (that is, both terms of a pair can be valorized simultaneously). This will require further explanation in specific contexts at appropriate times in my discussion.
Essentialism and matriarchist discourses are only two of the elements contributing to the unique historical formation that is cultural feminism. Two further constitutive elements can be identified: anti-colonialist and environmental discourses in circulation within feminist and New Left circles in the 1960s and 1970s. In the next section, I outline how essentialism, matriarchism, environmentalism and anti-colonialism could be brought together to produce a cultural feminist account of the origin of patriarchy, male and female difference, women's continued subjection and the possibility of resistance.

II. THE MASTER NARRATIVE OF CULTURAL FEMINISM

Cultural feminism manifests the universalizing, totalizing impulse of Enlightenment discourses in its reconstitution of the origin of women's oppression as a narrative of the fall of the ancient matriarchies. Here I sketch this narrative in both Gould Davis's account and in the cultural feminist writings most influenced by her.

The fall of the ancient matriarchies: the origin of patriarchy

The ancient matriarchies, the last known vestiges of which were the Sumerian city states, Gould Davis claimed, existed some several thousand years B.C. In these prehistoric matriarchal cultures, the female values of justice, peace, wisdom and intelligence prevailed. Their inhabitants existed in peace and harmony with nature under the beneficent rule of matriarchs. The presence of a female deity, the Great Goddess, to Gould Davis, reflected women's high social status, a status based on their privileged access to the laws of nature and proximity to the female deity. Men, in these cultures, were subservient hunters. Against traditional Western beliefs, Gould Davis asserted that women, not men, were the great civilizations. It was women who created settlements and cities, domesticated animals, invented food preparation and storage.

13 The anti-colonial writings of most influence were those of Frantz Fanon in the Algerian context and those from the Vietnamese nationalist struggle. The most influential of the works from the newly emerging environmental movement was R. Carson, Silent Spring, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1965. In this regard, see Daly, Gyn/Ecology, p.21.
technologies, developed textile industries and commerce, and who created music, the arts, sciences, medicine and mathematics.\textsuperscript{14}

The ancient matriarchies in Gould Davis's account were figured as the natural order founded on the superiority of the 'first sex', 'woman'. What could account, then, for patriarchal rulership over the entire period of recorded human history? In Gould Davis's narrative of the fall of the ancient matriarchies, men's resentment of their servitude, the discovery of paternity, jealousy of female procreativity (womb envy) and fear of their expendibility instigated men's overthrow of the matriarchal social order. This patriarchal revolution, Gould Davis argued, marked the historical appearance of war, violence and rape. The female deity was replaced by a male deity and the idyllic existence of matriarchal cultures was replaced by the essentially destructive and degenerate culture of patriarchy.\textsuperscript{15}

These narratives of pre-historic matriarchal societies overthrown by a patriarchal revolution found an analogy in anti-colonial discourses and accounts of anti-imperialist struggles in Algeria and Vietnam. Works of writers like Frantz Fanon, and the particular attention he paid to the 'psychology of the oppressed', could be turned to a cultural feminist account of women's ongoing subjection to, and their condition under, patriarchal rule.

Patriarchal cultural imperialism and the subjection of women

The characterization of women as a colonized people was first fully elaborated within radical feminism through Barbara Burris's 'Fourth World Manifesto' (1971). Drawing on writers like Fanon, Burris claimed that women were the first colonized people. For Burris, the 'territory'

\textsuperscript{14} Gould Davis, op.cit., pp.20,29,33,40-45,63-65; Morgan, Going Too Far, pp.309-310 reiterates this narrative but with more emphasis on women's possession of a 'life force' by virtue of their reproductive function as accounting for their high status. Note that the idea of women as the 'great civilized' sits awkwardly with notions of women as being closer to nature in these accounts. This is an instance of both terms of the nature/culture binary pair being simultaneously valorized.

occupied and colonized was and remains women's bodies, over which, Burris claimed, men have historically fought for ownership and control. On Burris's account, marriage and the family are colonial institutions which serve the ongoing subjugation and control of women through laws of male ownership of and access to women's bodies. Women's self-determination of their own territory/bodies, she argued, is continually denied through anti-abortion laws and other controls over and exploitation of women's bodies.\textsuperscript{16}

According to Burris, a women's culture, albeit suppressed and devalued, has nevertheless developed under patriarchal colonial conditions. This culture, for Burris, does not represent the natural disposition of women, but is developed under conditions of oppression and imposed by men. As such, women's culture constitutes the 'fourth world' in Burris's account.\textsuperscript{17} Burris posited that men installed a sexual division of labour, where women were confined to domestic and childrearing functions. Through being confined to these functions, women developed their so-called 'natural' attributes of emotion, intuition, love, a concern with the personal and with relationships. While women's culture was developed under conditions of colonization, it nevertheless, for Burris, constituted a resistive and defiant counter-culture.\textsuperscript{18}

Having clearly attributed the stereotypical female qualities to women's condition of colonization, these qualities nevertheless represented, to Burris, the most essential 'human' characteristics. As such, she claimed, women's culture was far superior to 'inhumane' male culture. Burris's tendency to reify femaleness and female culture is reflected in her deployment of the term the 'female principle'. It is this principle, she believed, that should be proudly asserted by women.\textsuperscript{19} That this claim and the article more generally could be read as promoting essentialism


\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., op.cit., pp.332,355. Burris's characterization of women's culture as a 'fourth world' was an attempt to re-cave a space for women's autonomous organizing in the New Left within the context of the ongoing subsumption of women's struggle to other Left causes. By 1971, it was the anti-imperialist cause in Vietnam.

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., pp.335-338,340,352,354-355.

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., pp.354-357. At this point in the text, Burris deploy an androgyne thesis and gender-role theory. Burris was not the first radical feminist to evoke the concept of the 'female principle'. In 1969, Roxanne Dunbar of Cell 16 had defined feminism as "the liberation of the female principle in all human beings - the world view which is maternal, materialist, peaceful (noncompetitive)" (Echols, op.cit., p.161). This was not a popular or dominant view at the time, however.
and women's natural superiority is recognized in the postscript, where Burris asserts that it would be a tragedy if women were to make their oppressed state into a virtue and a model of humanity and the new society.\(^{20}\)

Others, however, were not so equivocal about the value of women's culture. Gould Davis's growing influence in radical feminism rapidly subsumed Burris's reservations about elevating women's culture. Through matriarchist discourses, the culture that Burris understood to have developed from women's colonized condition was reconstituted as the authentic form that women's culture took before the patriarchal revolution. In 1974, for example, Robin Morgan,\(^{21}\) following Gould Davis, Fanon and Burris, claimed that women's history, values and culture were taken from them in the patriarchal seizure of women's territory (bodies). She asserted, with Burris, that this women's culture was universal, crossing all other national and racial cultures, and that therefore the political priority and goal of all women must be their liberation from patriarchal colonial control.

Cultural feminism, in reconstituting the master narrative of radical feminism as a grand epic of the fall of the ancient matriarchies and the rise of a global patriarchal order, again reflects the singularizing impulse of Enlightenment discourses and the continuing subsumption of race and nationalist struggles to the primary struggle against male domination.\(^{22}\) As I now go on to show, the problem of difference is still at work in cultural feminists' constitution of men as essentially different to women, and in their constructions of coherent, stable, universal categories of 'man' and 'woman'.

\(^{20}\) Burris, op.cit., pp.356-357.

\(^{21}\) Morgan, Going Too Far, p.161.

\(^{22}\) The 'Addition to the 1st Printing of Lesbian Separatism: An Amazon Analysis' provides a striking example of this. The authors, in the first printing of the book, had stated their support for third world women who had decided that their highest priority was to join with men in the struggle to de-colonize their countries. In the 'Addition', the authors renounced that position, claiming they had unwittingly collaborated with the true enemy (men) by being seduced by the anti-classist, anti-racist rhetoric of the Left. They now saw their previous position as divisive of women, and re-asserted the radical feminist maxim that all women must put the fight against patriarchy first. Further, they re-asserted the lesbian feminist position that all women must become lesbians (Alice, Gordon, Debbie and Mary, 'Addition to the 1st Printing of Lesbian Separatism: An Amazon Analysis', in Hoagland and Penelope (eds), op.cit., pp.307-309, originally published in 1974).
The essential difference of men and women

Cultural feminism, as I have argued, promoted female supremacy through a reversal within the traditional dualistic framework of Western philosophy. 'Female' displaced 'male' as the primary, valorized 'A' term in the male/female binary. On this model, female superiority can only rest on men's difference (Not-A), figured as 'lack' - as in accounts of the fall of the matriarchies (men's 'lack' of procreative power instigating a rebellion) - or as somehow derivative of women. In this section I explore the reconstitution of women and men as 'A' and 'Not-A' respectively. In reverting the traditional relationship of male to female, the 'problem' of women's oppression shifted from women's natural disadvantage (as in Firestone's formulation) to men.23

Valerie Solanas's 1968 S.C.U.M. Manifesto was the first radical feminist rendition of a genetic theory of male and female difference. Men, she argued, were a 'biological accident' - the result of an incomplete or mutant 'X' (female) gene. In their attempt to compensate for not being female, Solanas claimed, men engaged in mindless and destructive activities like war, government, high culture and sex. Further, men were responsible for death, disease, mental illness and violence, amongst other things.24

Building on this line of thought, a member of Cell 16 (a group highly influenced by Solanas) attributed male supremacy to the genetic insecurity of masculine identity. As 'XY', a man did not have the inner security of identity that femaleness confers: "Being XX, a woman feels

23 Whether it was actual men or only the male 'role' that was the problem had been an ongoing debate within radical feminism from its inception. Most early radical feminists resisted the idea that there was something about men's natures or psychology that made them want to dominate and control women and instead saw the male supremacy 'role' of oppressor as something that individual men could choose to take up or refuse. The goal of these feminists was the annihilation of the male 'role' (D. Densmore, 'Who Claims Men are the Enemy?'. in Stambler (ed.), op. cit., pp.48-49; Koedt, 'Lesbianism and Feminism', p.249; Atkinson, Amazon Odyssey, p.156; The Feminists, op. cit., p.369). On the other hand, Atkinson (Amazon Odyssey, pp.55-57) also claimed that men had a need to appropriate women's substance to themselves, a 'disease condition' she referred to as 'metaphysical cannibalism'. Firestone (op. cit., p.17) and the New York Radical Feminists, (op. cit., p.350, written in 1969 by Koedt and Firestone) held to the male 'role' thesis but also proposed that men have a psychological need to maintain their power over women. Betsey Warrior of Cell 16 showed no such equivocation, constituting men and their destructive drives as a dangerous, obsolete life form (B. Warrior, 'Man as an Obsolete Life Form', in Stambler (ed.), op. cit., pp.45-47, written around 1970). See also Echols, op. cit., pp.157, 160-161,165,171,188.

with total security that she is female" compared to a man who, containing attributes of both sexes (XY), does not know who he really is.25

For Gould Davis, there was originally only one sex - the female - who reproduced parthenogenetically.26 On Gould Davis's account, the 'second sex', the male, came about through a 'genetic error': a degeneration or deformation of the 'X' chromosome. The male (Y) gene represented, to Gould Davis, a mutation of the female (XX) caused, perhaps, by disease or bombardment of solar radiation. Gould Davis offered further proof that maleness was abnormal through citing recent genetic research that showed congenital killers and criminals possessed not one but two 'Y' chromosomes (a pathogenic 'double dose' of maleness). She also claimed that women's reproductive organs are older and more highly evolved than men's and that the penis was a later development than the vagina, evolving to suit female requirements.27

Jane Alpert, in her influential 1973 article, 'Mother Right: A New Feminist Theory', also called on biology to explain and affirm sexual difference. Drawing on Gould Davis, Alpert argued for founding a new feminist culture on the power base of the ancient matriarchies - that is, women's reproductive capacity. In a reversal of Firestone's formulation, Alpert argued that female biology, rather than being the enemy of the feminist revolution was, instead, its source. Maternal qualities, present in all women by virtue of their capacity for motherhood (be it actual or potential), she argued, were the prerequisite for an alternative women's culture.28

25 Echols, op.cit., p.163. This was not the position of most members of the group at the time, according to Echols, though see Warrior (a member of Cell 16), op.cit., for a biological determinist account influenced by Solanas.

26 Parthenogenesis is asexual reproduction by females which produces only female offspring. Men are completely superfluous to reproduction by this means, hence its attraction for separatists. See Gould Davis, op.cit., pp.34-35.
Parthenogenesis was also mobilized to Firestone's and The Furies cause of seizing the means of reproduction. See also L. Galana, 'Radical Reproduction: X Without Y', in Covina and Galana (eds), op.cit., pp.122-137.

27 Gould Davis, op.cit., pp.34-35. For Gould Davis, it was the XX configuration that conferred on women their superior intelligence and physiology.

28 Echols, p.253 also reports that Cell 16, particularly Betsy Warrior, and The Feminists post-Atkinson (who rejected biological arguments), endorsed Alpert's position. The Feminists rejected Alpert's argument that true feminists could still sexually relate to men, however. Further, Alpert's and Morgan's glorification of female procreativity also cut across the then prevailing view that motherhood was an oppressive institution of patriarchy. Many heterosexual radical feminists, along with most lesbian feminists, did not want to be mothers figuratively or literally at that time. See Alice, Gordon, Dibble and Mary, 'Lesbian Mothers', in Hoagland and Penelope (eds.), op.cit., p.304; Echols, op.cit., p.257 (article originally published in 1973). Lesbian feminists also saw in the maternalist discourses of Alpers and Morgan an incipient heterosexism. For this reason, lesbian feminists who took up cultural feminism generally avoided maternalism (Echols, op.cit., p.260). Rush, op.cit., pp.4-10, and Rich, Of Woman Born, are exceptions.
Evolutionary discourses could also be mobilized to an explanation of sexual difference in which women were characterized as superior to men. In her 1975 article, 'I Dream in Female: The Metaphors of Evolution', Barbara Starrett argued that women were a more highly evolved life form than men. She invited readers to:

imagine a species that has so evolved that its members begin to feel like another species, are aware of their differentness, and have developed a consciousness about themselves that is not explainable in contemporary symbols, forms, mindsets, language, art and culture. Women are now at this point.  

Some cultural feminists, Morgan, for instance, explicitly avoided biological explanations of sexual difference for fear of their implications - a 'final solution' to male domination through the literal extermination of men. Instead, Morgan abstracted difference through recourse to concepts of male 'style' and 'structures'. Her concept of the male 'style' mainly applied to the sexual and political arenas. The male 'style' emphasised genital sexuality, objectification, promiscuity, emotional non-involvement and coarse invulnerability. Women, on the other hand, to Morgan, put their 'trust' in love, sensuality, humour, tenderness and commitment. Morgan's characteristic ambivalence over the status of biology, however, also led her to claims that "every woman here knows in her gut the vast differences between her sexuality and that of any patriarchally trained male's", implicitly suggesting that women (unlike men) possessed an authentic sexuality. Similarly, Morgan resorted to the rhetoric of psychology in claiming that men were 'driven' to destroy the ancient matriarchies through their essential lack of procreativity.

Psychology provided cultural feminists like Gina Covina with further evidence of male and female difference. 'Left brain/right brain' studies,

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29 B. Starrett, 'I Dream in Female: The Metaphors of Evolution', in Covina and Galana (eds), op.cit., p.105.
31 Morgan, Going Too Far, p.181. This statement was made in the context of a debate at the 1973 West Coast Lesbian Feminist Conference about whether a transvestite male could claim to be a woman and a lesbian.
32 Ibid., pp.309-310.
33 Covina, op.cit., pp.95-99.
which became a subject of scientific interest in the 1970s, posited the functional division of the brain's two hemispheres. According to these studies, Covina reports, the left hemisphere of the brain is the site of logical thought, analysis and categorization. It is concerned with facts and material evidence. The right hemisphere, on the other hand, is the site of synthetic thinking processes. It makes connections between information, thinks laterally and tolerates ambiguity.

Because they possess the same brains, on this functional differentiation model men and women should, theoretically, think alike. Left brain/right brain studies instead claimed to show that hemispheric brain function is sexually differentiated. In left brain/right brain experiments, Covina reports, men tended to demonstrate a left brain specialization (logical, egotistical) functioning while women demonstrate a preference for right brain (intuitive, empathetic, creative) functions. These findings provided Covina with an explanation for male domination. She claimed that a compulsion for hierarchical ordering is inherent in analytical and categorizing functions (the dominant mode of male thought). And because men's dominant left brain functions proceed through abstractions (the right brain being the site of connecting the self to the world and others), the ensuing lack of a moral sense enabled men, without conscience, to take over the world and dominate women.

Covina was uncertain as to whether men's left brain bias caused male thinking and its correlate effect of domination, or whether men's thinking was a result of left brain bias produced through their domination of women. In any event, she was sure that women were superior to men, not only by virtue of their bias towards the more valuable, 'human' (i.e. other-oriented) half of the brain, but also because women's brains, according to left brain-right brain studies, possess a greater anatomical

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34 Ibid. In the context of feminist role theory, part of the project of androgynization involved encouraging both sexes to think with both sides of their brains. However in the cultural feminist context where the androgyny thesis was rejected, the means of transcending dualistic thinking often involved the assertion of one side of the divide - feelings - and its modes of communications: art and music. See, for instance, Starrett, op.cit., pp.114-115. What this strategy instead seemed to do was install the dominance of the 'feeling' side. In other words, it merely effected an inversion of values of the thinking/feeling dichotomy, not its transcendence. I discuss this problem and some of its effects in humanist and feminist pedagogical practice in my article 'The Politics of Nurturant Teaching', Studies in Continuing Education, Vol.15, No.1, 1993, pp.50-61.

35 The characterization of men as 'soulless', incapable of humane emotions and moral reflection is found throughout cultural feminism, for example in Covina, op.cit., p.96.
connection between the two hemispheres. Hence, women are more adept at integrating both types of brain functioning.\textsuperscript{36}

Barbara Starrett,\textsuperscript{37} too, took up the idea that the division of brain labour between men and women was a result of patriarchy. She argued that women had not been allowed to develop the supposedly 'superior' rational modes of thinking but had instead been forced to assume the lower status modes of thought represented by right brain functioning. Over time, she argued, these different male and female modes of thought had become registered genetically.

While Covina and Starrett may have been ambivalent on the question of whether sexually differentiated ways of thinking were developed under patriarchal social conditions or were essential to men and women, others were more certain that gendered thinking was biologically determined. Julia Penelope and the C.L.I.T. Collective's\textsuperscript{38} discussion of male and female language, for example, rests on the assumption of fundamentally different male and female modes of experiencing and thinking. In these accounts, the existence of an original, authentic, pre-patriarchal language of women was often posited.

Through heterosexual and lesbian cultural feminist narratives of the violent overthrow of the ancient matriarchies and their correlate accounts of sexual difference, men were constructed as plunderers, pillagers, ravagers, rapists, and as essentially violent, destructive, sadistic and 'inhuman'.\textsuperscript{39} If women were the source of life on the planet, it was then possible to posit men oppositionally as a destructive 'death force' in the world.\textsuperscript{40} In reconstituting the 'truly' human as those attributes possessed by women by virtue of their association with nature and immanence -

\textsuperscript{36} This 'brain androgyny' thesis conflicts with Covina's (op.cit., p.94) simultaneous assertion that women's and men's different ways of perceiving are based on their genital differences: the penis/line representing aggressiveness and linear thinking, while the vagina/circle signifies inclusiveness and holistic thinking.

\textsuperscript{37} Starrett, op.cit., pp.113-114.


\textsuperscript{39} See also, Douglas, op.cit., pp.73-74; Gould Davis, op.cit., p.146; C.L.I.T. Collective, 'C.L.I.T. Statement No.2', p.364.

\textsuperscript{40} There are many references to men as the 'death force'. See, for instance, Covina, op.cit., p.91; Gutter Dyke Collective, 'This is the Year to Stamp Out the "Y" Chromosome', p.339; Brown, A Plain Brown Rapper, p.49 (although Brown did not support the biological determinist line); Daly, Gyn/Ecology, p.32 ; C. Spretnak, 'Introduction', in C. Spretnak (ed.), The Politics of Women's Spirituality: Essays on the Rise of Spiritual Power within the Feminist Movement, New York, Anchor Press, 1982, xviii.
specifically, in bringing new life through birth, and in the care and protection of children - man was consigned to uncivilized bestial 'animality' on the grounds of his inhumanity and uncontrolled sexual lust.\footnote{In terms of the manoeuvres within the traditional binary pairs needed to effect these reconceptualizations of men and women, 'animal' aligned with 'male' against the now 'human' 'female', even as 'female' retained its alignment with 'nature' and the body. For characterizations of women as 'body', and as, like or allied to nature see, for example, Daly, Gyn/Ecology, p.28; C.L.I.T. Collective, 'C.L.I.T. Statement No.2', p.357; Covina, op.cit., pp.92-93; Gould Davis, op.cit., p.336; Johnston, Lesbian Nation, p.190; S. Griffin, Woman and Nature. The Roaring Inside Her, New York, Harper Colophon, 1978, passim.}

This separation of male 'animalistic' sex from female nurturant procreativity resonates with dominant nineteenth century understandings of male and female sexuality. In its contemporary reformulation, for example through the writings of members of the by then matriarchially-inclined radical celibate group Cell 16, women were reconstituted as naturally, hormonally 'hyposexual': possessing a low sex drive and therefore not liking sex as much as men.\footnote{Echols, op.cit., p.163.} With an essential connection between violent conquest and male sexuality having been established through accounts of the 'fall' of the matriarchies, rape was increasingly viewed as the prototypical expression of actual men or, in the more 'metaphysical' accounts, the figurative male.\footnote{Covina, op.cit., pp.94,99, though she equivocates on the question of whether this is male sexuality under patriarchy or maleness que maleness; Starrett, op.cit., p.107; Penelope, A Cursory and Precursory History of Language, p.80, Johnston, Lesbian Nation, p.165 characterized men as the biological aggressor and the penis as the prime organ of invasion of women. S. Brownmiller, Against Our Will, Hammondsfort, Penguin, 1976 (first published 1975), pp.14-15 claimed that when men discovered their biological capacity to rape they proceeded to do it. Rape to Brownmiller 'is nothing more or less than a conscious process of intimidation by which all men keep all women in a state of fear'. Brownmiller's work built on earlier radical feminist analyses e.g. B. Mahnhof and P. Ksquon's 1971 article 'Rape: An Act of Terror', in Koett, Levine, Rapone (eds), op.cit., pp.228-233. By 1973 many lesbian feminists were claiming that all heterosexual sex was rape. See, for example, Gutter Dyke Collective, 'Finally Out of Drag', in Hoagland and Penelope (eds.), op.cit., p.177.}

Cultural feminists' production of categories of sexual difference effected a reduction of 'man' to 'woman' and of all women to the same by virtue of a presumed shared authentic women's culture, based on materialism. Ironically, what was once seen as an ideological operation of patriarchy, the production of different masculine and feminine gender roles and attributes, now represented the 'truth' of women. Cultural feminists' attempt to overcome the problem of differences between women, through a totalizing history and the assertion of a unity of women's experience across racial and other boundaries, soon met with
resistance both from other radical feminists and from black and 'third world' feminists.44

Through the production of a universal narrative of the rise of the global patriarchal order through the overthrow of the ancient matriarchies, cultural feminists found new purpose. The proposition that women's leadership role had been wrongfully usurped by men saw women reconstituted as the agents of moral authority in the world. From a no less privileged position of the figure of universal human emancipation in early radical feminism, 'woman' had become saviour of the world.45 How essentialist, matriarchist and anti-colonial discourses informed cultural feminism's telos and programmatic prescriptions is the subject of the following sections.

The projects of cultural feminism: matriarchism and women's spirituality

Cultural feminism's grand narrative of human culture's 'fall from grace' to its present debased condition led Gould Davis to claim "the matriarchal counterrevolution . . . is the only hope for the survival of the human race".46 For Gould Davis, a matriarchal society, based on the superior feminine virtues of selflessness, compassion and empathy, would rectify all that had gone wrong during the patriarchal regime.47 In Morgan's view, the new social order would be a 'gynocratic world' that ran on the power of women. Eschewing male leadership styles, Morgan claimed female rulership would instead lead the world to peace, love and environmental harmony.48

45 Gould Davis, op.cit., p.337, for instance, understood women to be the vanguard of the Age of Aquarius. The development of cultural feminism, in tandem with a growing concern with environmental degradation was also one of the conditions of possibility for eco-feminism.
46 Ibid., p.18.
48 Morgan, Going Too Far, p.187.
The call for a project to restore the matriarchal social order under female rulership created several conceptual and strategic problems, however. Promoting relations of female domination in a post-patriarchal society demanded that cultural feminists refute their previous political commitment to egalitarianism, although some imagined the possibility of an egalitarian matriarchy.49 The idea of women's 'leadership', too, had been highly contested in the women's movement. In the cultural feminist context, some claimed that hierarchies, as a product of the 'male concept', were unknown in matriarchal cultures.50

The reconceptualization of women as essentially peaceful and non-violent also created strategic problems. How was the new world order to be achieved if women would not resort to arms or even engage in traditional political struggle because it, too, was a 'male' way of operating?51 Given this dilemma, unlike in some earlier radical feminist writings, the call to armed revolutionary struggle to overthrow patriarchy, even when mobilizing the figure of the ancient mythological warrior amazon, was purely rhetorical.52 And what was to be done with men? What would be their place in the new matriarchal world order?

The most extreme responses to these questions emerged, predicially, from those who conflated male domination with a 'maleness' that inhered in actual men. Having foreclosed on the possibility that men could change, they promoted the argument that, if sexism is the source of all other oppression and maleness is the source of sexism, then in order to rid the world of sexism (and, by extension, all oppression) the world must

49 Alice, Gordon, Debbie and Mary, 'Separatism', p.32.

50 Echols, op.cit., p.165; Covina, op.cit., p.93; Starrett, op.cit., pp.108-109. 'Leadership' was also characterized as patriarchal and destructive. See, for example, Melbourne Gay Women's Group, op.cit., p.444. Women, on the other hand, were 'naturally' collective oriented. See Gutter Dyke Collective, 'Over the Walls, Separatism', p.30. Rita Mae Brown (A Plain Brown Rapper, pp.139-150) however argued that the movement needed leaders, though not stars. I will return to this topic in Chapter 6.

51 Morgan, Going Too Far, p.183; Starrett, op.cit., p.113; Gutter Dyke Collective, 'Over the Walls, Separatism', p.30. To Morgan, all political and legislative campaigns were reformist and a product of 'male style', serving only to prop up a system that benefitted men. By the mid-1970s, many radicals active throughout the 1960s were exhausted, impatient with 'reform politics' and despairing of the possibility of imminent revolution. Similarly, while many radical lesbians saw the necessity of a continuing fight against discrimination there was nevertheless an emerging concern that their energies might forever be bound up in reformism which in the end, to them, was a losing battle (Alice, Gordon, Debbie and Mary, 'Problems of Our Movement', p.393).

52 Alice, Gordon, Debbie and Mary, 'Directions', in Hoagland and Penelope (eds), op.cit., pp.40-41 (article originally published in 1973). Atkinson, Solanas and some other radical feminists who were involved in underground organizations (Alberta for example) advocated, and sometimes enacted, armed struggle. See Echols, op.cit., pp.105,247-263.
be first rid of men.\textsuperscript{53} Most cultural feminists stopped short of advocating the literal extermination of men, however. Julia Penelope instead imagined that men would ultimately simply blow themselves up and leave whatever was afterwards left of the earth to the women.\textsuperscript{54} And, despite its threatening title, the Gutter Dyke Collective's paper 'This is the Year to Stamp Out the "Y" Chromosome'\textsuperscript{55} did not in fact promote androicide but instead was an incitement to man-hating. Self proclaimed 'killer dykes' did not, as far as is officially known, go around killing men. However, Valerie Solanas, attempting to implement her manifesto, \textit{S.C.U.M. Society for Cutting Up Men}, shot and almost killed Pop artist Andy Warhol in 1968.\textsuperscript{56}

Where 'maleness' functioned as a metaphor for all that was wrong in the world, as in Morgan's work, most prescriptions for overcoming the 'man' problem were not so extreme. Cultural feminists who had husbands and were the mothers of boys, Morgan for instance, were also understandably more equivocal about the logical consequences of reinstalling a matriarchal social order. This perhaps explains their abstractness on questions of the form of the new society they desired and how it was to be achieved. Gould Davis simply bypassed the question of means (other than promoting a 'matriarchal counterrevolution'), instead imagining that, when matriarchy was restored, men and women would simply live in harmony under the just guidance of a beneficent (female) deity whose laws were enforced by persuasion and goodwill rather than by force or coercion.\textsuperscript{57}

Like Gould Davis, Morgan's vision of the future included men but at the same time she was not prepared to fight men to create the new order. Having eschewed traditional politics and power struggles, and because she believed in the self-evidence of her claims, concrete strategies were absent from Morgan's account. Instead, the transition to matriarchal rule seemed to rely on a dawning awareness in both men and women that

\textsuperscript{53} Gutter Dyke Collective, 'Over the Walls, Separatism', p.30; Warrior, op.cit, p.45, though Warrior thought men's lives might be spared if they could control and subdue their natures. Warrior imagined future reproductive needs could be taken care of with sperm banks and reproductive technology.

\textsuperscript{54} Penelope, 'A Cursory and Precursory History of Language', p.59.

\textsuperscript{55} Gutter Dyke Collective, 'This is the Year to Stamp Out the "Y" Chromosome', pp.338-339.

\textsuperscript{56} Echols, op.cit., p.105; Atkinson, \textit{Amazon Odyssey}, p.107.

\textsuperscript{57} Gould Davis, op.cit., pp.337-338.
matriarchy was the natural order and that men had wrongfully usurped women's legitimate leadership role. Morgan seemed to suggest that, once men had apprehended this truth, they would simply step aside and let women take over. It would be a matter of the rightful restoration of things, not the outcome of a grubby political stoush.\footnote{Morgan, Going Too Far, p.310.}

Some biological determinists, too, shared a similar idealism about the possibility of social change from within present circumstances. When conceptualized as an 'organic' process which required no human intervention, social change would simply 'spontaneously' emerge. Kathleen Barry, for example, believed that: "With the essence of motherhood and a sense of preservation of life imprinted in our genes, matrilineal descent will naturally become the organisation of the society we envision".\footnote{Cited in Echols, op.cit., p.255.}

The idea of the women's movement as a spiritual movement had been first proposed in 1971 by Mary Daly, then a member of the liberal feminist organization N.O.W.\footnote{M. Daly, 'The Spiritual Dimension of Women's Liberation', in Koedt, Levine, Rapone (eds), op.cit., pp.260,263-264,266 (article originally published in 1971). At that point, Daly was a member of N.O.W. and promoted role theory and the androgyny of men and women. It was in this promotion of 'humanization' and 'self actualization' that Daly saw the spiritual significance of the women's liberation movement. She saw feminism, unlike patriarchy, to be in harmony with what is authentic in the ideals of the religious traditions. Daly reports on her membership of N.O.W. in 1969-1971 in her autobiography Outercourse, pp.103-104.} The deification of the 'female principle' through matriarchist discourses encouraged the further spiritualization of the women's movement. Accordingly, many cultural feminists took up religious or spiritual practices. At the 1973 West Coast Lesbian Feminist Conference, Robin Morgan 'came out' as a witch. She confessed that she was now a follower of the ancient matriarchal faith of 'wicce' (women's wisdom), devoted to the worship of The Great Mother. She argued that, if patriarchal power worked to cast the female lifeforce into the form of a male god, then women's liberation should be concerned to restore female divinity.\footnote{Morgan, Going Too Far, pp.187-188.}

Morgan's associate, Jane Alpert, similarly proclaimed feminism to be a spiritual movement whose goal was to supplant the worship of a male
god with that of the female principle, a goal that was shared by other cultural feminists. For another cultural feminist it followed that, if the female psyche houses the divine, then the women's revolution is a spiritual revolution and, further, that the women's revolution was primarily a revolution in the female psyche.

The reconceptualization of the women's movement as a spiritual movement saw a concurrent shift in register from the genres of the political (with their particular codes of speech and rhetoric, their particular forms of argument) to that of the moral/religious. This shift in register is particularly noticeable in some cultural feminists' accounts of the fall of the ancient matriarchies. These accounts were often in the form of parables. As an explanatory device, parables may have been used in lieu of history. That is, the use of parable may have reflected the author's speculations in the face of an absent historical record. But parables, as rhetorical devices, are also modes of moral instruction which work to secure an effect of 'truth'. Unlike political polemic, whose appropriate 'position of reception' is one of critical engagement in rational debate, a religious parable, invoking the authority of the deity or the 'natural order', presumes a truth to be conveyed and not questioned. Through this device, cultural feminism installed a new 'regime of truth' which positioned its purveyors as the new moral authority.

In its 'metaphysical move', cultural feminism sought to reunify the women's liberation movement through a reimposition of the 'one', but in a different register. In the context of bitter contestations within the movement around race, class and sexuality, the idea of a shared material oppression was no longer tenable. If sameness could not be found in the material conditions of oppression, then it might be found in the shared experience of being a biological woman. And, if women's rituals under the auspices of the goddess could invoke a transcendent experience of

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62 Ehols, op.cit., p.251.
63 Starrett, op.cit., p.118.
64 P. Clarke, 'Women Living Together', Refractory Girl, Summer 1974, p.10.
65 J. Frow, Marxism and Literary History, Oxford, Blackwell, 1986, pp.68-74. To John Frow, 'register' is akin to 'genre' and Foucault's concept of 'discourse'. They all refer to 'ways of speaking' in particular situations. I use the concept of a shift in register in this instance because it expresses more dramatically the change in content and style of feminist discourse effected through cultural feminism.
66 Florence Rush's parable of the fall of the matriarchy, op.cit., for instance, provided a moral lesson about the present state of the women's liberation movement.
the One, then all separateness between women might be seen as illusion. In this way, cultural feminism can be characterized as a transfiguration of Enlightenment phallocentrism under the sign of the (female) One.

The distaste for traditional modes of political struggle and programmatic by spiritual cultural feminists, and the new focus on inner transformation through spiritual practices, generated few concrete strategies for social change. While this shift of focus of struggle and change from social and political structures to the psyche is one of the defining characteristics of cultural feminism, some cultural feminists, deploying anti-colonial discourses, prioritized a project of establishing a women's culture.

The projects of cultural feminism - separatism and a women's culture

Through the new conception of women as possessors of the 'life force', by virtue of their procreative powers, some cultural feminists refigured the relation between the sexes as one of parasitism - that is, as men's parasitic dependence on women's energy. Julia Penelope, Marilyn Frye and Mary Daly,⁶⁷ claimed that men, lacking the life force, were entirely dependent on women for sustenance and ego strength. Men therefore needed to secure their access to women's energy, hence the patriarchal institutions of heterosexuality, marriage and the family were established. In these accounts, the battle of the sexes was reconceptualized as men's struggle for control of the 'life force' that inhered in women.

Penelope's assertion that women already possessed what men wanted (the life force) and that the entire history of patriarchy was based on the simple fact of men's need for women's energy, led her to conclude that there was no feminist battle to be fought. Women already had what they needed. Indeed, to both Penelope and Frye, political engagement only fed precious energy to the enemy, albeit through acts of opposition.

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⁶⁷ Penelope, 'A Cursory and Precursory History of Language' (1976); Daly, Gyn/Ecology, pp.xi,2,12,56,59-61,63; M. Frye, 'Some Reflections on Separatism and Power', an article written in 1977 and reproduced in her book The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory, Freedom CA, The Crossing Press, 1983, pp.95-109 (see also p.171). This argument draws on Atkinson's notion of 'metaphysical cannibalism'. For Daly, because patriarchy reduced women to a state of 'living death', men's need for women's energy was 'necrophilic'.
and negation. Political struggle therefore only served to strengthen men. Women, through separatism, they claimed, instead could bring down patriarchy through refusing to engage with it, through denying it energy. A more liberating strategy for women, according to Penelope and Frye, was to put energy into each other and create a new women-centred identity, culture and lifestyle.

The assertion that the new woman-centred identity and culture were to be created contradicts cultural feminism's essentialist discourse on sexual difference. Two contradictory conceptions of subjectivity are simultaneously deployed, which Foucault usefully delineates as deriving from humanistic and Enlightenment discourses.

In his essay 'What is Enlightenment?', Foucault argued that the humanist and Enlightenment traditions in Western thought are not coextensive. What is today understood by the term 'humanism' for Foucault rests on the conception of a fixed human nature or essence. The humanist project is therefore one of 'recovery' or 'discovery' of this human essence. The Enlightenment conception of the subject, on the other hand, offers the possibility of a critique and permanent recreation of ourselves. While these two contradictory conceptions of the subject were obviously in play in radical feminist role theory (in its project of restoring the essential humanity of men and women, alongside a rationalist/Enlightenment project of men and women remaking themselves), the confounding effects of their simultaneous presence are most evident in cultural feminism.

The presence of humanist and Enlightenment conceptions of the subject in cultural feminism manifests as a tension between two projects. In one project, the evidence of past women's cultures and communities provides points of identification for contemporary feminists and lesbians, and a template for the construction of a women's culture and a new feminist identity. In the other, history offers the 'truth' of a long suppressed culture and identity which can purportedly be recovered. Sometimes, the two projects can seemingly co-exist without awareness of any contradiction, as in Barry's remark that: "We must look to our

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68 M. Foucault, 'What Is Enlightenment', in Rabinow (ed.), op.cit., p.44.
matriarchal past for guidance in defining a culture that is a logical extension of nature". 69

For both projects, 'herstory' - the reconstruction of this lost women's history from myths, archaeological evidence and whatever fragments survived the patriarchal 'his'-torical record - did not expose the discursive processes though which the category of 'lesbian' came to be, as outlined in Chapter 1. Rather, 'herstory' posited an historical and universal 'woman' and 'lesbian' who had been the historic subjects of patriarchal suppression and oppression. 70 Both projects, as 'productive' exercises - constructing 'true' discourses, subject positions and possibilities of identity 71 - also produced norms of 'natural' women and lesbians. These norms, as I show later, functioned to regulate and discipline their subjects.

In lesbian cultural feminism, lesbian identity was reconstructed through historical or mythological evidence of past women-only communities. This project soon generated claims and vivid accounts of the historical continuity of lesbian existence and of female resistance to patriarchy. Lesbian historians set about unproblematically reconstituting Amazons, witches and other past or mythological communities of women as the original lesbian feminists. Modern lesbians, to them, were simply the last in a long and noble line of conscientious objects to the patriarchal heterosexual imperative. 72

69 Echols, op.cit., p.255. Penelope, 'A Cursory and Precursory History of Language', pp.57,59; Starrett, op.cit., pp.111-112; Covina, op.cit., too, simultaneously promote projects of self-creation and self-discovery. Other commentators have noted this seeming unawareness of self-contradiction in feminist and gay and lesbian writings. See Fuss, Essentially Speaking, p.103; Phelan, Getting Specific, p.50.

70 Weeks also sees this type of historical project as unhelpful, arguing: "What we cannot do, if we want to understand why we are where we are is simply assume that nothing changes, that gays and lesbians have always existed as we exist today, that homophobia has always remained constant" (Against Nature, p.93; see also pp.88-91,159 and Sexuality and its Discontents, pp.9-10).

71 See also Phelan, Identity Politics, p.63. Similarly, Lillian Faderman's view is that goddesses and ancient matriarchies provided lesbian feminists with a sense of origins, history and place and therefore a legitimate belonging on the planet (Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers, p.229).

Jill Johnston, for example, in her 1972 article 'Return of the Amazon Mother' and her book Lesbian Nation, drew her inspiration from the myths of a pre-patriarchal female-only Amazon nation. The Amazons, recast as the original lesbian separatists in her account, represented to Johnston the extreme 'feminist wing' of the ancient matriarchies. Contrary to the maternalist mother clans, Amazons were conquerors, horse trainers and huntresses, and played a central role in the defence of matriarchal societies against the patriarchal assault. For Johnston, patriarchy might eventually be destroyed through a contemporary 'lesbian nation' of tribal groupings and renegade bands of women based in self-sufficient communes.

Johnston's powerful image of a 'lesbian nation' signals the reformulation of lesbian separatism as a necessary strategy in the project of reinstating the matriarchal order, or as the necessary condition for a female counterculture which would eventually take over from patriarchy. Following the example of the Black nationalist movement within the U.S. in the 1960s, feminist 'counter-institutions' such as women's health clinics, food co-ops, credit unions, businesses, social venues and community centres, cultural festivals, record companies, publishing houses and other media were established in the 1970s. Lesbian separatism, when reconstituted as a project of developing a permanent lesbian counter-culture along the lines of Black nationalism, fuelled the growing trend to establish separatist communes. This lesbian counter-culture has survived in small pockets into the 1990s.

Lesbian separatism was understood to provide a space for developing lesbian cultures and identities free from the contaminating influence of men. But the meaning of lesbian identity was far from transparent. Even amongst those separatists who believed that an 'authentic' lesbian identity would emerge in a space outside the

73 J. Johnston, 'Return of the Amazon Mother', in Birkby, Harris, Johnston, Newton, OWyatt (eds), op.clt., pp.65-76 (article originally published in 1972); Johnston, Lesbian Nation, pp.259-262. Johnston's concern was to recuperate motherhood for lesbians, like herself, who were also mothers, without compromising lesbian feminists' self-constitution as strong, independent and self-determining.

74 Alice, Gordon, Debbie and Mary, 'Separatism', p.32; Echols, op.clt., p.271.

75 For a full discussion of the developing lesbian feminist community in the U.S. see Faderman, Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers, Chapter 9; Echols, op.clt., Chapter 6. See also V. Taylor and L. J. Rupp, 'Women's Culture and Lesbian Feminist Activism: A Reconsideration of Cultural Feminism', Signs: Journal of Women In Culture and Society, Vol.19, No.1, Autumn 1993, pp.32-61. In Australia, lesbian separatist rural communities still exist, for instance 'Amazon Acres' and 'Women's Land' near Wauchope, N.S.W.
repressive influence of patriarchal culture, there was no agreement on what a lesbian was. The projects of 'herstory' had generated multiple and contested discourses of 'true' identity and sexuality. Projects which sought 'authentic' knowledge of women at the site of sexual difference - specifically, the reproductive body - could at least appeal to the 'unquestionable' authority of nature.

The 'truth' of women

The reordering of the traditional binary pairs effected by cultural feminism, listed at the beginning of this chapter, saw the site of 'truth' shift from its traditional association with masculinity, the mind and transcendent reason to femininity, the body, the unconscious and personal experience. Whereas men had justified their domination of women by claiming a superior capacity for reason, cultural feminism's epistemological reversals led to claims that women were superior to men by virtue of their closeness to the newly valorized realm of nature. This particular reversal initiated a move to reject theory, on the grounds that it was ontologically male, and led to cultural feminism's characteristic, though not universal, anti-intellectualism.

The rejection, or at least suspicion, of reason's capacity to elicit the truth of woman, goes some way in explaining why the search for women's 'authentic' self often proceeded through non-rational means and produced experientially-based knowledges. For Morgan, the de-colonizing project began with demystifying the female body. She urged women to take up the speculum and explore their vaginas, a project vigorously pursued in workshops organized by the newly emerging and feminist-run women's health centres. Continuing the Marxist dictum of the attainment of enlightened knowledge as the first step to revolution,

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76 The uncertainty as to lesbian identity, sometimes many years after the advent of lesbian feminism, is expressed in pieces such as Penelope, 'Lesbian Separatism: The Linguistic and Social Sources of Separatist Politics', in Hoagland and Penelope (eds), op.cit., p.45 (article originally published in 1974); Gutter Dyke Collective, 'Gut Feelings', in Hoagland and Penelope (eds), op.cit., p.279 (article originally published in 1973); P. House, 'Response By Penny House', in Hoagland and Penelope (eds), op.cit., p.235 (article originally published in 1978); Cowan, op.cit., p.221; Frye, 'To be and be Seen: the Politics of Reality', an article written in the late 1970s and reprinted in her book The Politics of Reality, pp.152-174.

77 Daly (Gyn/Ecology, pp.xii,22) and Morgan (Going Too Far, pp.189-190), for instance, were pro-reason and pro-intellectualism.
Morgan claimed that "the speculum may well be mightier than the sword".76

Nature's 'truth' of women resided in genetic memory79 or, as for Mary Daly, in 'the call of wild'.80 Some claimed women's truth could be accessed through a reconstructed women's experience of menstruation, pregnancy, natural childbirth and mothering.61 Others held that unconscious sources of knowledge could be tapped through ritual evocation in witches' covens, dancing and mediation.82 Dreams, channelling and the ouija board were also promoted as means of accessing unconscious knowledge,83 as was 'listening' to oneself and 'hearing' one's feelings.64 And from within modern Western discourses of sexuality as the site of the 'truth' of self could come Charlene Spretnak's claim that, unlike men's experience of orgasm (the 'little death'), women's orgasm invoked "a little glimpse of enlightenment."85

For cultural feminists, the problem encountered in this project was how to represent women's truth without the distorting influence of patriarchal language. Cultural feminists such as Penelope, Daly and Covina claimed that women's unique experience could not be articulated through patriarchal language. To them, men's language forms, like their thinking, were linear, ordered and inflexible. Patriarchal language imposed limits on the lateral thinking of its female users and therefore interrupted the free flow of communication. Indeed, words themselves (as a patriarchal form of communication) more often than not got in the way

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76 Morgan, Going Too Far, p.162. Interestingly, the newsletter of Sydney's Leichhardt Women's Health Centre, established in 1975, was titled 'The Speculum Speaks'.
79 Daly, Gyn/Ecology, p.39; Covina, op.cit., p.95. See also Penelope, 'A Cursory and Precursory History of Language', p.60.
80 Daly, Gyn/Ecology, pp.315,343-346.
81 Spretnak, 'Introduction', xviii.
82 Ibid., xviii.
83 Clarke, op.cit., p.9; Oujla, 'The Universe In You: Suggestions for Sexual Syncopation', in Covina and Galana (eds), op.cit., pp.227-233. Apparently, Elizabeth Gould Davis used the ouija board as a source of information.
84 Clarke, op.cit., p.9.
85 Spretnak, 'Introduction', xviii. Spretnak's claim is broader than that of 'truth' of the self. Rather, for her, the 'body truth' of women reflected universal 'truth'.

of communicating women's 'real' meanings. Patriarchal language was, as Mary Daly put it, an 'alien tongue' to women.

Responses to the problem of representing women's 'truth' were varied. Some cultural feminists believed that women should dispense with language altogether. They claimed that women, who intuitively knew what others meant, didn't need things explained through tedious verbalization. Women who were in touch with their authentic femaleness did not even need to speak to each other: their common feelings, perceptions, concerns and reactions were simply 'understood'.

Others, Julia Penelope for example, saw the need to develop a women's language. She believed that, in a separatist community, men's language (which she believed had been programmed into women) would simply drop away from lack of use. Understanding language on the model of 'transparent medium' of communicating the truth, Penelope claimed that a new women's language would evolve from and express their own meanings, needs, feelings, body experiences, thoughts and perceptions. Dichotomous thought and abstraction (as male modes of thinking) and their expression in language forms would simply disappear.

While the subject of much experimentation and attempts at elaboration, the project of 'women's language' soon stalled. The idea that male language necessarily compromised women's authentic self-expression produced frustrating and debilitating effects. Gina Covina's article, for example, came to an abrupt end when she realised that, in attempting to explain the origin of dichotomous thought (male and female brain functions) she, too, had resorted to dichotomous categories. Her efforts to 'think and communicate female' outside of male forms ultimately broke down into confusion, despair and paralysis.

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86 Penelope, 'A Cursory and Precurious History of Language', p.60; C.L.I.T. Collective, C.L.I.T. Statement No.2', pp.364-367. The C.L.I.T. Collective's position was more that present patriarchal language is a degraded and distorted version of women's language, which men stole.
87 Daly, Gyn/Ecology, p.19.
89 Penelope, 'A Cursory and Precurious History of Language', p.60.
Problems such as these, generated by projects which constituted the 'truth' of women through recourse to notions of women's authentic experience or women's 'true nature', clearly derive from a belief in the possibility of an accessible and representable 'outside' to patriarchal social relations and symbolic systems. Similarly, the technologies of self through which women inserted themselves into cultural feminism's truth regime sought to produce, through dividing practices, the ostensibly 'ontological' purity of female self 'outside' of patriarchy and male corruption.

Lesbian separatism as a decontamination zone

The transcendent impulse of Enlightenment discourses worked in cultural feminism to constitute the site of transcendent truth not in consciousness and reason, but in nature and the body. If practices of consciousness-raising had accomplished the insertion of individuals into the truth regime of earlier, egalitarian forms of radical feminism, then regimes of the body and psyche were the means of subjection to cultural feminism. And where consciousness-raising had sought to get 'male-identified' consciousness out of women's heads, cultural feminism's project of recovering the truth of women from a deep self, necessitated "genuine psychic struggle".  

Through the overlapping of religious and medical discourses circulating within cultural feminism, it was also possible to conceive of a personal project of exorcism as a mode of excising malignant maleness and brain patterns from one's being. As Covina put it:

I feel that to exorcise the patriarchy from my body/mind enough to breathe a little around its cancer, I have to reject every detail, going back to the beginning of the patriarchy and the ways men's brains and bodies work.  

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Cultural feminism, having constituted women as ontologically 'pure' in their essential moral sensibilities and co-operative, egalitarian behaviour had to explain how racism, classism and other forms of domination and conflict between women could occur, particularly in separatist communities into which oppressive patriarchal practices supposedly could not reach.

The ongoing tendency to constitute difference as divisive and to subsume racial and other differences between women under the primacy of gender relations in the name of a unified feminist politics, saw 'maleness' mobilized to an explanation of conflict within feminism. Morgan, as I have noted, rejected the 'male' political style (which, to her included race and class analysis) not only because it emanated from the male Left but also because "it is The Man who looks for the differences". For Morgan, then, division within feminism was caused by women who had incorporated the male 'style'.

In the context of biological discourses, as I indicated earlier, maleness could be conceptualized as a pathological state. The medical analogy was further extended through the notion that this destructive maleness was contagious, that it could somehow detach itself from men and contaminate women. Maleness could also infiltrate the lesbian community and act like a cancerous growth within it. Whether through a 'style' that was unwittingly incorporated into one's thinking and behaviour, or through previous patriarchal programming, 'maleness' could be imported into the separatist aseptic zone by female carriers and work to undermine solidarity.

Lesbian separatism, in this context, was refigured as a 'decontamination zone' - a place where women might divest themselves of the contaminating influence of maleness. In this context, separatism could offer women some protection through isolation from the contaminating agent. Indeed, a concern with asepsis saw a tightening of procedures of contact such that potential conduits of male contamination (e.g. bisexual women, lesbians with sons or male friends) were further

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93 Morgan, Going Too Far, p.197.
divided off from the lesbian feminist community. Further, to then remain pure, women needed to maintain their isolation from men and patriarchal society. Through notions of contamination by pathogenic maleness, separatism, for many, became a permanent requirement for female integrity.

The reconstruction of lesbian identity through cultural feminism continued to be forged against heterosexual and bisexual women, literally or metaphorically. Deploying role theory in a context of sexual essentialism, the C.L.I.T. Collective, for instance, claimed that an even more insidious danger to lesbians than the man within was the 'straight woman' (the partly conditioned woman) who lived inside her. As 'the agent within' (the title of the piece), the 'straight woman' consciousness attempted to kill off the lesbian in women. In the context of race, class and sexual conflicts within radical feminism at the time, 'the agent within' also acted as an agent provocateur who exploited differences, inflamed problems and created divisive incidents. Problems in the women's movement, then, to the C.L.I.T. Collective, were the result of patriarchy's attempt to destroy the women's movement through its agents, straight women.

The problem of difference is evident in lesbian cultural feminism's continuing tendency to construct lesbian identity in opposition to 'male-identified' heterosexual and bisexual women, and to blame conflicts within the women's movement and in relations between women, particularly lesbians, on male-identified 'agents' within the movement or within individual women. Additionally, through narratives of the fall of the matriarchies, lesbians could be refigured as the agents of historical resistance to patriarchy. How a particular construction of 'lesbian' was constituted as the privileged subject of cultural feminism is the subject of the next section.

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95 Ibid., pp.27-31.
III. THE MAINTENANCE OF LESBIAN SUPREMACY WITHIN CULTURAL FEMINISM

The ascendency of cultural feminism, as I have noted, signalled radical feminists' rejection of role theory and its project of androgynization. For many lesbian feminists, role theory's demise also brought an end to their grudging acceptance of bisexuality as the liberated, ideal form of human sexuality. The conflict between different conceptions of the sexuality to be liberated - bisexual, polymorphous or lesbian - was resolved. Cultural feminism's promotion of essential differences between the sexes saw a concomitant move in lesbian feminism to ontologize lesbianism and the lesbian. The construction of a specific, positive lesbian identity, in the name of discovering the 'true' lesbian self, was, however, again exacted at the cost of its 'others': men, hetero- and bi-sexual women and certain lesbians.

Claims to lesbian superiority and, more problematically, the necessity for political lesbianism, could be reworked through discourses of essential sexual difference. Whereas role theory could be turned to a claim of lesbian superiority with reference to its norm of authentic subjectivity (the androgynous 'human'), through discourses of essential sexual difference the lesbian could be figured as superior with reference to the newly valorized normative 'A' term, 'woman'. From the 'truly human' not-woman of role theory, the lesbian in cultural feminism became 'woman' par excellence.

Lesbian supremacy and the lesbian vanguard

Cultural feminists' claim that women were essentially different and superior to men had led, in some writings, to positing women as a separate 'people'. Lesbian cultural feminists extended this line of thought, claiming that lesbians were essentially different and superior to heterosexual women. These arguments ranged from a modest claim that lesbians, too, constituted a separate 'people' with their own

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98 Morgan, *Going Too Far*, pp.174,187; Alice, Gordon, Debbie and Mary, 'Separatism', p.34.
consciousness, or a new 'species' of woman, to more strident claims that lesbians represented the highest common denominator or 'class' of women or the "highest woman's consciousness." Lesbians deploying evolutionist discourses argued that, while women in general were more highly evolved than men, amongst women lesbians showed the greater evolutionary potential. In the context of matriarchism and the valorization of 'nature', the claim that mother nature was a lesbian was a claim to lesbian supremacy.

With the life force imputed to women, yet prone to loss through male parasitism, it was possible to claim that lesbians by definition were more 'alive' than heterosexual women. In Penelope's parable of women's emergence from the 'dark times' (patriarchal rule), women who related to men showed physical signs of loss of their life force: they developed a harried, haggard look and severe lines around their eyes and mouth. Within a short time of being amongst women and no longer drained of their energy, however, women were restored: they "looked fuller, healthier, somehow more alive and self-satisfied". The characterization of the lesbian as possessed of greater amounts of the life force than heterosexual women perhaps explains Adrienne Rich's claim that "it is the lesbian in us who is creative".

The construction of the lesbian as 'woman' par excellence proceeded through disruptions to the binary conceptions of Western philosophy effected through cultural feminism. Feelings (the traditional preserve of women) rather than reason had become the mark of humanness. Lesbian

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99 Bunch, 'Learning from Lesbian Separatism', p.435. Bunch was not a biological determinist, however, and these sentiments were more a statement in support of separatism.

100 Douglas, op. cit., p.151. The positive affirmation of a new 'species' of human being resonates with Edward Carpenter's earlier characterization of, and hopes for, the 'third sex'.

101 L. Shear, 'Album Liner Notes from A Lesbian Portrait', in Hoagland and Penelope (eds), op. cit., p.266 (article originally published in 1977).

102 C.I.T. Collective, 'Trying Hard to Forfeit All I've Known', in Hoagland and Penelope (eds), op. cit., p.403 (article originally published in 1974).


104 Cowan, op. cit., p.222.

105 Penelope, 'A Curious and Precursory History of Language', p.57.

106 Rich, On Lies, Secrets and Silence, p.201. In a postscript to this 1976 talk, Rich described the negative reaction this statement provoked from several members of the audience to whom this paper was presented regarding its lesbian supremacist inference. Nevertheless she did not recede from this position.
cultural feminists worked this new association of the 'human' with women and feelings into an argument that a bisexual woman was only human (in touch with her feelings) insofar as she related to other women. In other words, the bisexual woman was only 'half human'. Her exclusively heterosexual sister, whose relationships with men offered no possibility of an 'authentic' emotional life, was therefore totally alienated from her humanity and 'true' womanly nature (feelings).

The re-appearance of the concept of 'alienation' from the self in a cultural feminist context demonstrates that role theory and its conditioning thesis, while ostensibly abandoned, could be reworked through a discourse of essential sexual difference. In place of the (implicitly male) androgyne of early radical feminist role theory, the essential female came to represent the 'truly human'. Through the association of 'human' with 'female' in cultural feminism, role theory could again be mobilized to an argument for lesbian superiority and vanguardism.

The C.L.I.T. Collective, for example, posited an essential female nature (an 'ovarian intellect' identical with the concept of the 'female principle') which underlay conditioning to 'mal(e)function'. 'Mal(e)function' was the condition of women who had been trained to accept male values, attitudes and rules of behaviour. Through conditioning to mal(e)function, the C.L.I.T. Collective claimed, women were controlled and patriarchy maintained without the necessity for coercive force.

In the C.L.I.T. Collective's account, the lesbian by definition was a woman who did not lose all of her 'ovarian intellect' in the process of patriarchal socialization. Whereas lesbians' resistance to patriarchal conditioning was explained in earlier lesbian feminist role theory by their greater closeness to their 'humanity' (conceived on the figure of the androgyne), in the cultural feminist context lesbians' resistance was imputed to their greater closeness to the female principle (construed in this instance as 'woman identification') and true female self. The greater

107 Gutter Dyke Collective, 'Over the Walls, Separatism', p.27.
the closeness to the female principle, the C.L.I.T. Collective claimed, the
greater the potential for women to love other women.

The most elaborated cultural feminist reworking of lesbian supremacy
and vanguardism through role theory can be found in Mary Daly's
_Gyn/Ecology_. For Daly, women's true self has been colonized and
possessed by the spirit of patriarchy. The rise of patriarchy, through the
violation, murder and dismemberment of the Goddess and of women is
retold in patriarchal myths promulgated through male-created religions,
literature, art, knowledge systems and, in the contemporary era, most
particularly through the media. These myths, to Daly, work to secure
women's complicity in the patriarchal order through inculcating women
into patriarchy's women-hating ideology. The public enactment of these
myths, either in their sacred or secular forms (for example, in practices of
female circumcision, footbinding, wifeburning, witchburning and modern
gynaecology), kills the divine spark in women, and trains women to be
victims and men victimizers. The end result of this conditioning for most
women is a state of mystified, feminized, cosmeticized 'robotitude' or
living death. Daly refers to women in this conditioned state as 'fembots',
totaled' women or, in the case of liberal feminists or women in the
professions, male-identified 'token' women.\(^{110}\)

Like the Radicalesbians' manifesto, Daly's book speaks to the
'lesbian imagination' (woman identification) in all women. It is the lesbian
who, as by definition representing a failure of conditioning to femininity,
exemplifies feminist resistance to patriarchy. Daly's path to authentic
feminist subjectionhood entails a process of de-conditioning and
demystification which, reworked through matriarchist/Catholic theological
discourses, assumes the proportion of an exorcism of patriarchal demons
and reconciliation with a 're-membered' goddess. The attainment of
enlightened transcendence, in Daly's account is reworked as a
'metapatriarchal' journey of discovery to a utopic 'otherworld': a 'deep
reality' which is simultaneously a 'free space' where women create
themselves. For Daly, it is a journey of self-transformation undertaken
only by those women who make a decision to act on their lesbian
imagination.\(^{111}\)


Despite its obfuscating strategy of linguistic subversion and its powerfully evocative word play, for which it is renowned, 112 Gyn/Ecology is essentially a restatement of lesbian separatism in a different (spiritual) register. Gyn/Ecology, in simultaneously promoting a journey of 'discovery' of the true self and one of 'self-creation' in a utopic free space 'outside' patriarchal symbolic systems, exemplifies the tension between humanist and Enlightenment conceptions of subjectivity characteristic of feminist, lesbian and gay discourse. In both her Enlightenment and humanist modes, Daly's project works to produce 'true' and 'false' feminists, 'true' and 'false' lesbians, a discussion to which I will return. 113

The question of which lesbians are 'true' (women identified) lesbians, in the context of re-asserting the lesbian as the privileged feminist signifier, also arises in Adrienne Rich's influential 1980 essay, 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence'. The essay reiterates lesbian feminism's claim that compulsory heterosexuality is central to male domination. Heterosexuality's 'unnaturalness' as a social institution is, to Rich, evidenced through the degree of imposition, management, organization, propaganda and coercion required for its maintenance. That the enforcement of compulsory heterosexuality requires such coercion, to Rich, indicates the presence of a potential counterforce to be restrained, a counterforce she identifies as lesbianism. In Rich's rendering of the 'repressive hypothesis' of sexuality, the historical repression of lesbianism and the penalization of women's coupling is the condition of patriarchy. 114

Rich's repressive hypothesis of lesbian sexuality enables her to figure lesbians as a continuing historical presence. Cross cultural and historical evidence of separatist women's communities, and other non-heterosexual living arrangements, are taken by Rich to constitute a history of conscious 'lesbian' resistance and 'no-saying' to patriarchy. Besides the problems of cross-cultural and transhistorical claims of lesbian identity, noted previously, Rich reasserts that lesbians represent the values that are crucial to the freedom of women as a group. Rich

113 Daly, Gyn/Ecology, pp.20,26,93,372,387. See her pp.418-422 for a full listing of the 'eight deadly sins' and their purveyors.
takes an equivocal stance on heterosexual women: on the one hand seeing them as collaborators with the enemy and, on the other, rendering them as feminist insofar as their lives and concerns were manifestly 'woman identified'.

Rich's essay in many ways revisits the Radicalesbians paper 'The Woman-Identified Woman' of a decade before. Like the Radicalesbians, Rich promoted an expanded definition of lesbianism, the 'lesbian continuum', which included any 'woman identified activity'. At one end of this continuum, Rich located a range of woman identified experiences including friendships or care-giving relations between women, women working together, and breastfeeding. Further along the continuum, woman identified activity included bonding with other women against male tyranny, and giving other women political and practical help. At the other end of the continuum stood lesbian sexual activity. In equating woman identification with lesbian feminism, Rich implicitly upheld lesbians' privileged feminist credentials, albeit only for certain lesbians, as I later show. But while Rich stopped short of calling for compulsory lesbianism, others were not so reticent.

Jill Johnston, in *Lesbian Nation*, for example, reworked claims to lesbian superiority and vanguard status through matriarchist and biological discourses. Johnston cites Charlotte Wolff's proclamation that the independent, self-determining lesbian of today resembles the image and prerogatives of woman in matriarchal times. And, reasserting the lesbian's privileged feminist status, Johnston claimed:

> if the phrase biology is destiny has any meaning for a woman right now it has to be the urgent project of woman reclaiming her self, her own biology in her own image, and this is why the lesbian is the revolutionary feminist.

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116 Ibid., pp.51,53-54. However, unlike the Radicalesbians, Rich was not a role theorist and her position on essential sexual difference is ambivalent. In a 1981 interview cited in Douglas, op.cit., p.90, however, Rich asserts she is not a biological determinist.
118 Ibid., p.156.
Further, she asserted: "You are who you sleep with. Thus the lesbian can rightfully say she is the woman par excellence". Reiterating the necessity for political lesbianism, Johnston asserted that until all women were lesbian, there would be no true political revolution. As the subtitle of *Lesbian Nation (The Feminist Solution)* suggested, "if you're not part of the solution, you're part of the problem".

Rich's, Daly's and Johnston's implicit or explicit privileging of lesbians along with the reassertion of lesbianism as a necessary feminist political 'choice' sat uncomfortably in a world of fixed gendered identities and ontological lesbianism. The 'choice' here seems to be whether to embark on the journey to authentic female self which, for Daly, Johnston and others entailed a necessary choice of lesbianism. But, as these writers suggested, only certain forms of lesbian behaviour attested to a 'true' lesbian feminist consciousness.

The 'true' lesbian feminist

Cultural feminism's conceptions of 'authentic' lesbian subjectivity, were contradictory. On the one hand, the reassertion of the lesbian as self-determining, autonomous and independent revisited older representations modelled on the (implicitly masculine) 'human' of role theory. On the other hand, where lesbians were understood as women *par excellence*, they were promoted as the embodiment of authentic femaleness: nurturant, empathetic and non-competitive, and upholders of the female values of interdependence, collectivism and reciprocity.

These contradictions extended into conceptions of authentic female and lesbian sexuality. Morgan's championing of fidelity and commitment, for instance, flew in the face of hostility towards monogamy in the lesbian

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119 Ibid., p.175. See also pp.184-185.

120 Ibid., pp.166,178-180,707,777. See also Gorgons, op.cit., pp.394-398; Cowan, op.cit.


122 In 1990, Julia Penelope reasserted the truth of the female self as lesbian: "Being a Lesbian isn't a 'choice'. We choose whether or not we'll live as who we are. Naming ourselves Lesbian is a decision to act on our trustest feelings" (her emphasis). See J. Penelope, *Call Me Lesbian*. *Lesbian Lives, Lesbian Theory*, Freedom CA, The Crossing Press, 1990, p.42.
community at the time. Ideas of women's naturally low sex drive sat uneasily with a sexual liberation project which generated triumphal claims of lesbians as sexually liberated, and as sexually superior to and more lustful than men. The dominant view, however, was that lesbian relationships should not be so much genitally but sensually oriented and that 'proper' lesbian love-making, against the penetrative-orgasmic focus of male-identified sexuality, should emphasize emotional intimacy, touching, hugging, kissing and holding each other.

This new norm of lesbian feminist sexuality produced categories of deviant, 'anti-feminist' sexual practices. These included displays of 'excessive' sexuality and the consumption of pornography which, to radical feminists, represented the sexual objectification of women. Male behaviours observed in lesbian bar culture, such as getting drunk and cruising for quick sex, represented to Robin Morgan a manifestation of an "epidemic of male style" in the women's community. And, as Karla Jay observed, any lesbians admitting to using a dildo at that time would have been verbally castigated for engaging in 'phallic' sex.

The most demonized of all sexual practices, however, was sadomasochism. While Rich's definition of the 'lesbian continuum' included heterosexual women in certain circumstances, it did not necessarily include all lesbians. For Rich there is a nascent feminist political content in the act of choosing a woman lover or life partner in the face of

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124 C.L.I.T. Collective, 'C.L.I.T. Statement No.2', p.363; Johnston, Lesbian Nation, p.165. Lesbian Nation includes many diary entries of Johnston's sexual exploits. In a similar 'sex positive' discussion, Rita Mae Brown reported on 'infiltrating' a gay male bath house in 1975. Gay bath houses at the time served only one purpose: casual sex with no ongoing emotional commitment. The experience of the bath house left Brown pondering the paucity of sexual opportunities and experimentation for women. Brown found in this pre-AIDS gay male 'funk palace' a model of erotic freedom which inspired her to call for an extension of male sexual choices for women. She asserted that women, too, needed sex for sex's sake, free from the tyranny of romantic love. R. M. Brown, 'Queen for a Day: A Stranger In Paradise', in Jay and Young (eds), Lavender Culture, pp.69-76 (article originally published in 1975).

125 Faderman, Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers, pp.231-232.

126 Morgan, Going Too Far, p.183.

127 K. Jay, 'The Spirit Is Liberationist but the Flesh Is . . . or, You Can't Always Get Into Bed With Your Dogma', in Jay and Young (eds), After You're Out, p.211.
institutionalized heterosexuality. But for lesbian existence to realize this political content in an ultimately liberating form, the erotic choice must deepen and expand into conscious woman identification - into lesbian feminism.\textsuperscript{128}

Lesbians engaging in s/m practice, for one, by definition were not lesbian feminists.

Given that patriarchy exemplified relations of inequality and domination for all radical feminists, it is not surprising that, for Daly, male sadism and female masochism represented "the style and basic content of patriarchy's structures".\textsuperscript{129} S/m sexual practice was, to her, another patriarchal 'sado-ritual' enacting patriarchy's theology of female torture, murder and dismemberment. Without explicitly identifying them, Daly's 'convocation' of the lesbian elect would nevertheless not include butch/femme lesbians or lesbians involved in sadomasochistic (s/m) sexual practices.

For all radical and lesbian feminists, s/m, as eroticizing power differences and enacting relations of domination and subordination, served only to reinforce patriarchy. Seen as violating both the norm of egalitarianism and the principle of identity (treat likes alike) operating in a sexual exchange between equals (women), s/m was anathema to feminism. How, then, could women's s/m fantasies and desires be explained? For some, women's s/m desires and fantasies were a symptom of their powerlessness in the patriarchal social order. For others, s/m desires were a sign of male-identification or 'mal(e)function' through the introjection of patriarchal values. As essentially alien to the natures of women, it was believed that s/m fantasies would disappear once women's political power grew.\textsuperscript{130}

Similarly abhorrent to all radical and lesbian feminists was the enactment of male and female roles and power relations in lesbian

\textsuperscript{128} Rich, 'Compulsory Heterosexuality', p.66.
\textsuperscript{129} Daly, Gym/Ecology, p.96.
butch/femme relations. Role-playing, as representing an 'unauthentic' relationship, was itself objectionable to feminists. Butch/femme couples were therefore seen to be not only alienated from their authentic selves but also to be complicit in the patriarchal social order.\footnote{Penelope, 'Lesbian Separatism', p.51; Johnston, Lesbian Nation, pp.154-155,176; Rich, On Lies, Secrets, and Silence, p.225; Daly, Gyn/Ecology, p.20. For historical accounts of butch/femme lesbians, see Faderman, Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers, Chapter 7; J. Nestle (ed.), The Persistent Desire. A Femme-Butch Reader, Boston, Alyson Publications, 1992.}

Given that both butch/femme and s/m relationships were seen as anti-feminist and untrue to women's nature, the idea that a woman could, of her own volition, seek sexual pleasure through ritualized relations of domination and subordination was heretical. That she would act on her s/m fantasies in full knowledge of their 'anti-feminist' connotations (as in the case of practitioners who claimed to be feminist) was, perhaps, a sign of perversion.

The construction of 'true' lesbian sexuality was a parallel operation to that of the construction of the essential difference of the sexes. This shift to essential difference was nevertheless effected within the conceptual framework of earlier 'egalitarian' forms of radical and lesbian feminism. Through a reversal of the value of individual terms of the binary pairs of Western philosophy, and shifts of individual terms in relation to their traditional alignments, 'woman' became the valorized term of cultural feminism against which 'man' was constituted as 'lacking'. Lesbian supremacy was sustained in cultural feminism through figuring the 'lesbian' as 'natural woman' \textit{par excellence}.

While there were conflicting claims about the true nature of lesbian sexuality, the new conceptual associations forged between maleness, sex and violence generally worked to produce 'desexedualized' accounts of 'authentic' lesbian sexuality. The construction of 'true' lesbian identity and sexuality continued to proceed at the cost of its traditional 'others': heterosexual and bisexual women. But lesbian feminist identity was increasingly being forged at the cost of those lesbians deemed to be engaged in anti-feminist (non-egalitarian) activity: those in butch-femme relationships and practitioners of sadomasochism. The lesbian feminist sexual norm was soon contested by its excluded 'others', however, and by lesbian sadomasochists in particular. The following chapter investigates the ensuing 'sex wars' in detail.
CHAPTER 5

THE LESBIAN SEX WARS: LESBIAN SADOMASOCHISM AS ANTI-FEMINISM

The first signs of the coming 'sex wars' started appearing in the U.S. in 1976. In articles published in gay magazines, feminist lesbians who engaged in sexual practices proscribed by lesbian feminism (described in the previous chapter) began to resist the appellation of 'anti-feminist'.

From this moment on, confrontations over lesbian sexual practice, particularly sadomasochism, were increasingly a feature of feminist and gay conferences, festivals, parades and other events. Women Against Violence in Pornography and Media (WAVPM), one of whose targets was s/m imagery and practices, formed in San Francisco in 1976. In 1978, hostilities escalated with the formation of the first lesbian s/m support group, Samois, in San Francisco. Public antagonism between Samois and WAVPM ensued over the following years. Developments in Britain and somewhat later in Australia, followed a similar pattern.

Samois' anthology of lesbian s/m graphics and writing, Coming to Power was published in 1981. In the same year, the issue of lesbian s/m

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4 Califia, ‘A Personal View . . . ’, p.250. Pat Califia and Gayle Rubin were members of Samois. Naming the group Samois was itself a consciously inflammatory tactic, being taken from The Story of O - an s/m novel and film targetted by radical feminist anti-pornography groups (p.253). These groups picketed theatres where the movie was playing and demanded the book and film be banned.

and the questions it raised about feminist theorizing on sexuality found their way onto the pages of mainstream feminist publications.\textsuperscript{6} The conflict between U.S. radical lesbian feminists and 'sex radicals' (those excluded from radical and lesbian feminist discourse by virtue of their sexual practices or views on female sexuality) culminated in the following year at the Scholar and the Feminist conference 'Towards a Politics of Sexuality' at Barnard College in New York.\textsuperscript{7} The controversy surrounding the conference represented a dramatic public eruption of the debate on female sexuality going on within feminism, a debate which has simmered on, punctuated by periodic outbursts of open hostilities, into the 80s and 90s.\textsuperscript{8}

The approach to the debate on lesbian s/m in this chapter does not propose to adjudicate the claims by its proponents and its critics. Rather, I figure the lesbian s/m debate as a struggle over the meaning of lesbian


\textsuperscript{8} In 1993, the sex wars erupted in Australia. That year, a series of conferences on the theme of 'Sexualities and Cultures' was convened by the Humanities Research Centre of the Australian National University, Canberra. Early in that year, a group of writers and academics in Sydney and Melbourne, including Shelia Jeffreys and Denise Thompson, sent a letter to the Vice-Chancellor of the A.N.U. protesting the apparent exclusion of a radical feminist perspective from the conferences, the conferences' domination by gay male interests and some of the invited speakers' anti-feminist positions. These invited speakers and Fellows were identified in the letter as Gayle Rubin, Cindy Patton, Lisa Duggan and Carol Vance, whose stance on lesbian sadomasochism, pornography and, they alleged, child sexual abuse (paedophilia) was characterized as 'libertarian' collusion with male supremacist values (reference: the protest letter, a copy of which was supplied by Dr. Jill Julius Matthews). These claims, reproduced publicly, and the responses to them, from Gayle Rubin and the 'Sexualities and Cultures' programme's co-convenor, Dr. Jill Julius Matthews, peppered the gay and lesbian press throughout the year. Unlike the Barnard College conference, no action was taken by A.N.U. administration.

The protest continued at the July 'Regimes of Sexuality' conference. In a provocative move, Shelia Jeffreys launched her new book, The Lesbian Heresy, in a building adjoining the conference venue on the A.N.U. campus. The booklaunch (which this writer attended) was to provide a forum for the 'suppressed' radical feminist voice to be heard. Those in attendance, including Jill Matthews and Gayle Rubin, were subjected to a diatribe, by Shelia Jeffreys and other speakers, on the perils of Rubin's position on sexual politics and on libertarianism generally. Not surprisingly, heated exchanges ensued.
identity and 'feminist' sexual practice.\footnote{This is also an understanding of the 'sex wars' promoted by Vance 'Epilogue', p.431 and Rubin, 'The Leather Menace', p.218. See also Ardill and O'Sullivan, op.cit.; J. Penelope, 'Do We Mean What We Say?: Horizontal Hostility and the World We Would Create' and 'Heteropatriarchal Semantics and Lesbian Identity: The Ways a Lesbian Can Be', in her book Call Me Lesbian, pp.78-97; K. Mirlam, 'From Rage to All The Rage: Lesbian-Feminism, Sadomasochism, and the Politics of Memory', in I. Reil (ed.), Unleashing Feminism. Critiquing Lesbian Sadomasochism in the Gay Nineties, HerBooks, Santa Cruz, 1993, p.16; Jaffreys, The Lesbian Heresy, p.1.} I take the debate to be an instance of power and resistance in Foucault's sense - specifically, of sex radicals' resistance to the normalizing operations of lesbian feminist discourse on sexuality. When cast in this way, sex radicals' disputation of the lesbian feminist orthodoxy on s/m, and the subsequent consolidation of lesbian s/m communities and identities, can be understood to parallel the emergence of and developments within the contemporary gay and lesbian movement. As a historical-political discursive formation, lesbian s/m, like radical feminism, gay liberation and lesbian feminism, can be analyzed in terms of its conditions of existence, its constitutive discursive elements and their effects within s/m discourse.

One focus of the chapter, then, is identifying the discursive resources and strategies deployed in articulating a pro-s/m argument and positive s/m identity, with particular reference to two of its exponents: Gayle Rubin and Pat Califia. I argue that the discourses and practices of lesbian sadomasochism were partly shaped by their constitution as lesbian feminism's abject 'other'. As I show, articulating a pro-s/m position attentive to the arguments of its feminist critics itself produced a disciplinary regime of s/m practice centred around consent and reciprocity.

While Foucault is often cited as a major theoretical resource in the articulation of a pro-s/m position, a repressive hypothesis of sexuality is often simultaneously deployed. When articulated through a repressive hypothesis, discourses of s/m reintroduce the problematics of earlier gay liberation and lesbian feminism - particularly, a 'natural' s/m sexuality, a 'negative' and oppositional relation between sex and power, a transcendent impulse, and a liberatory political project. In some writings, the repressive hypothesis leads to claims that sadomasochism not only represents the 'truth' of the self, but also that sex radicals constitute the new revolutionary vanguard.
In promoting a proliferation of bodily pleasures and powers, lesbian s/m seems to promise the fulfillment of Foucault's project of "counter[ing] the grips of power with the claims of bodies, pleasures, and knowledges, in their multiplicity and their possibilities resistance". However, I argue that aspects of Foucault's work lend themselves to a reading which endorses a repressive hypothesis.

Besides offering an analysis of the debate over lesbian s/m, this chapter is also concerned to identify the discursive moves employed by Rubin to disrupt the lesbian feminist 'regime of truth' on sexuality and explore some of their effects within s/m discourse. As I go on to discuss in Chapter 7, her conceptual separation of gender (sexual difference) and sexuality (sexual activity) would prove to be a critical condition for the emergence of 'Queer Theory' in the 1990s.

I. THE EMERGENCE OF LESBIAN S/M

Like homosexuality, sadomasochism, as a category of sexual practice and experience, has a history. Its meaning as well as its forms are unstable, varying over time and across different social-political and discursive contexts. As in the case of homosexual practices, heterosexual and homosexual sadomasochistic sexual practices were in circulation before the advent of nineteenth century sexology or the modern women's, lesbian and gay movements. Sexual sadomasochism is also today practiced outside those movements. My concern here, however, is not with the meanings and forms of sadomasochism to those practitioners. Rather, this section traces the shifting and proliferating meanings and practices of sadomasochism produced through its reinscription within lesbian feminism and through the resistive discourses of lesbian sadomasochists.

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12 S/m, in terms of the number of practitioners, is predominantly a heterosexual practice. See A. Masterson, 'A Night at Club Cruel', H/C, July/August 1993, pp.90-95, for an account of the s/m club scene in Sydney and Melbourne, and T. Polhemus and H. Randall, 'Hot Monogamy', New Woman, August 1994, pp.94-97.
Sadism and masochism, like homosexual activity, were first constituted as pathologies of the sex instinct in the mid-nineteenth century. For Krafft-Ebing, sexual sadism and masochism were induced by cerebral abnormalities. Sadism, for him, was characterized by "the desire to cause pain and use force" while masochism was "the wish to suffer pain and be subjected to force". Sadists derived sexual pleasure in acts of cruelty and violence, and in humiliation, hurting or wounding. In Krafft-Ebing's classificatory scheme, sadistic acts ranged from biting and pinching to striking, whipping and flagellation to strangling, stabbing or, at the extreme, even murder. Masochists, as the 'perfect counterparts' to sadists, derived their sexual pleasure from these acts of violence at the hands of the sadist. While the masochist requested such treatment, for Krafft-Ebing the masochist's desire was to be completely and unconditionally subject to the will of the sadist. While most sadists in Krafft-Ebing's case studies were men, some were women. According to Krafft-Ebing, sadism and masochism were not confined to heterosexual relations, but were also found in homosexual relations where he found a particular tendency for masochism amongst male homosexuals.

What counts as sadomasochistic sexual practice today is in many ways quite different to that of a century ago. Lesbian sadomasochism is defined by Samois as "A form of eroticism based on a consensual exchange of power". It is an often highly formalized practice, involving elaborate, ritualized 'scenes' and roles planned by both/all participants. The roles of sadist and masochist are often exchanged. S/m practice as elaborated by Samois is also highly constrained by a set of rules, central to which is the use of a 'safe word' to signal the masochist's desire to

13 Krafft-Ebing, op.cit., p.131.
15 Samois (ed.), op.cit., title page.
16 The roles in these scenes are that of the sadist (also called 'master', 'top', 'mistress', 'dominant', 'dominatrix') and masochist (also called 'slave', 'bottom', 'submissive'). Apart from master/slave, roles can be varied to incorporate other scenes, such as teacher/student, Nazi/Jew, cop/prisoner, butch/femme and so on. These scenes involve wearing appropriate costumes and regalia, e.g. uniforms and insignia, leather garments, traditional feminine garments (which may also be made of leather), period costumes and so on. Sadomasochism can also encompass a sexual fantasy or 'scene' which the participants verbalize rather than act out. References: I. Young, J. Stoltenberg, L. Rosen and R. Jordan, 'Forum on Sado-Masochism', in Jay and Young (eds), Lavender Culture, pp.85-89,109; R. R. Linden, 'Introduction: Against Sadomasochism', in R. R. Linden, D. R. Pagan, D. E. H. Russell, S. L. Star (eds), Against Sadomasochism. A Radical Feminist Analysis, San Francisco, Prog In The Well, 1982, pp.2-3; S. L. Star, 'Swastikas: The Street and the University', in Linden et.al. (eds), op.cit., p.132; Jeffrey, Anticlimax, pp.214-216.
stop the scene.\textsuperscript{17} Depending on the scene, roles and sexual desires of the participants, sadomasochism also involves particular practices - for example, bondage and whipping\textsuperscript{18} - and a variety of paraphernalia and 'toys'.\textsuperscript{19} However, pain and the ritualized drama of domination and subordination in various forms are central to s/m practice and are used to heighten erotic tension and sexual pleasure. Wearing leather garments and practices such as skin piercing are also meant to heighten sensory awareness through eroticizing non-genital zones of the body.\textsuperscript{20} Within the lesbian and gay s/m community, preferred roles and practices can be communicated to prospective partners through an elaborate 'handkerchief code'.\textsuperscript{21}

There have been substantial shifts in the meaning and definition of s/m in the 100 years between Krafft-Ebing's formulations and those of present-day lesbian and gay s/m practitioners. Present day discourses of s/m emphasise consent; the roles of sadist and masochist are exchangeable; the s/m encounter is highly regulated through formalized rules of engagement; s/m, for lesbians at least, is centrally about an exchange of power; 'sadomasochism' today includes practices that do not by design inflict pain - for example, 'rough sex', wearing certain garments and penetration (fist fucking, sex with a dildo).\textsuperscript{22} In the next section I put the case that these present-day meanings and practices of lesbian s/m have been constituted to a great extent through both lesbian feminist discourse and through the articulation of lesbian s/m discourses in resistance to lesbian feminism's 'regime of truth' on lesbian sexuality.


\textsuperscript{18} Activities may include binding or bondage in anything from silk scarves to chains or harnesses through to full bondage gear; slapping, spanking with hands or a special paddle; whipping with leather thong; urination ('golden showers' or 'watersports') and/or defecation ('scat'); fistfucking (anally and/or vaginally); piercing (where nipples, clit, labia, scrotum, penis and other body areas are pierced by needles). References: Young et al., op.cit., pp.85-86; Linden, op.cit., pp.2-3; Jeffrey, Anticlimax, pp.212-215,217-221.

\textsuperscript{19} As well as the equipment listed above, 'toys' may include dog collars and leashes, handcuffs, tie clamps, enemas, bondage tables, racks, cages, chains, dildos. Sometimes a medieval torture chamber ('dungeon') can be set up. References: Linden, op.cit., pp.2-3; Jeffrey, Anticlimax, p.217.

\textsuperscript{20} Califia, Public Sex, pp.172,231-241; Jeffrey, Anticlimax, pp.218-221.

\textsuperscript{21} Originally a practice developed in the male gay community, the handkerchief code involves displaying a specifically coloured handkerchief in either the left (dominant) or right (submissive) hip pocket. See Samois (ed.), op.cit., pp.66-68; Linden, op.cit., pp.1,3.

\textsuperscript{22} Fist-fucking and dildo use by lesbians are only discussed in the context of s/m practice.
The construction of lesbian sadomasochism in lesbian feminism

Lesbian sadomasochism gains its significance (indeed its signification) in lesbian feminism through the construction of an ideal type of lesbian to represent 'liberated woman'. As I have shown over the past two chapters, in producing the category of 'true' lesbian feminist, categories of 'otherness' were formed. Because of their epistemological location in the binary logic of Western philosophical discourse, lesbian feminists' self-affirmation consisted of constituting themselves as the primary, positive 'A' term of an 'A/Not-A' dyad. To these categories of 'Not-A' (not-feminists, not-lesbian) were consigned all those things that were not 'authentic' or native to 'true' feminists or lesbians. Metaphorical 'maleness' and 'heterosexuality' found a home in lesbian feminism's most abject 'other': the lesbian sadomasochist.

Lesbian sadomasochism, as constituted by lesbian feminism, can be understood as a catch-all category for everything that feminist and lesbian sexual practice is not. Sadomasochism, according to lesbian feminists, is implicated in 'inegalitarian' power relationships and 'male-identification' because of its practices of role playing and 'heterosexual' (including penetrative) sex. As in the association forged between women and nature/the body/emotions in traditional Western philosophy, lesbian feminism's category of 'sadomasochism' consists of objects, practices, bodies and concepts which have no intrinsic connection to each other. Rather, the process of 'othering' produces contingent relations between disparate elements by virtue of their relegation to the same category. Hence, practices which do not necessarily involve pain, humiliation or violence (the traditional definition of sadomasochistic sex) - for example, anal intercourse and lesbian sex involving penetration by a dildo, the wearing of certain garments - find themselves reinscribed in lesbian feminist discourse as 'sadomasochistic'. Further, such practices, by virtue of their new association with sadomasochism, and through lesbian feminism's conflation of maleness, sexual violence and domination, were reconstituted in lesbian feminist discourse as violence.

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23. To Jeffreys, for instance, anal intercourse in gay male couples is violence because it is invested with domination and subordination. Similarly, 'piercing' to Jeffreys is implicated in male supremacy power dynamics because it involves penetration of the body (Anticlimax, pp.215,218,220). Linden, op.cit., p.4; S. R. Wagner, 'Pornography and the Sexual Revolution: The Backlash of Sadomasochism', in Linden et al. (eds), op.cit., pp.25-26; Ardill and O’Sullivan, op.cit., pp.287,288, have also noted that lesbian sadomasochism functions as a catch-all category of 'outlaw' lesbian sexual practices.
Compared to what its detractors soon termed 'vanilla' or 'bambi' lesbian feminist sexual practice, sadomasochism represented its mirror opposite. As Rubin observed "[sadomasochism] is dark and polarized, extreme and ritualized, and above all, it celebrates difference and power". She adds that, in creating a totalizing category of deviant (sadomasochistic) sex, lesbian feminists also demonized the practice, ascribing to it the singular value of 'all bad' and rendering it utterly repulsive. Through this demonizing process, s/m was also constituted as a sign of pathology.

To Rubin, lesbian feminism's argument against s/m sexual practice is essentially a moral determination in relation to lesbian feminists' own oppressive sexual norms. Within the lesbian feminist regime of morality, Rubin argues, s/m can be judged on no other criteria than 'good/bad'. The assignment 'all bad' effects a closure which prevents a consideration of s/m on grounds of consent and how the participants treat each other.

Rubin's project, then, was to inhabit, contest and recuperate the category of lesbian sadomasochism through its resignification as an ethical feminist practice. Like those earlier individuals who generated positive identities from sexological taxonomies of deviance ('inverts', 'homosexuals'), 'lesbian sadomasochists' reconstituted s/m as a positive sexual experience and identity. In the same way that new terms such as 'gays' and 'dykes' signified the emergence of new, politicized sexual identities, so too did s/m practitioners' defiant self-reconstruction as 'sex radicals' or 'sex outlaws' emerge out of a resistance to the normative regime of both lesbian feminism and the emerging New Right in the U.S. (amongst whose targets were 'deviant' erotic populations). And, like gays and lesbians of 1960s and 1970s, individuals who identified as lesbian sadomasochists did not simply deploy a 'reverse discourse' where sexology's (or lesbian feminists') verities were accepted without question. Rather, the pathologization of the category was itself contested. And it was through that contestation, which by necessity led to an engagement

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25 The trope of illness is commonly employed by critics of sadomasochism. M. Norris (1980), 'An Opinionated Piece on Sadomasochism', in Linden et.al.(eds), op.cit., p.106 described s/m as a 'sickness' while V. Walker-Crawford, 'The Saga of Sadie O. Massey', in Linden et.al.(eds), op.cit., p.150 claimed s/m was 'a cancerous growth that has taken firm root in most womin'. S/m has also been variously figured as a sign of psychological self-abuse, like an addiction (Walker-Crawford, op.cit., p.149), or as symptomatic of self-hatred (Jeffreys, Anticlimax, p.221, The Lesbian Hierarchy, p.35; Young et.al., op.cit., p.87), or as 'perversion' (C. Lesh, 'Hunger and Thirst in the House of Distorted Mirrors', in Linden et.al.(eds), op.cit., p.203).

with lesbian feminism and the New Right, that the category of sadomasochism was itself reconstituted and transformed.

Sex radicals' construction of lesbian sadomasochism

The formation of an s/m liberation movement and the articulation of lesbian s/m discourses followed the example of gay liberation. As Rubin put it: "the mobilization of homosexuals has provided a repertoire of ideology and organizational technology to other erotic populations".27 Accordingly, the plight of s/m practitioners as a stigmatized group within the gay and lesbian communities tended to be articulated through a repressive hypothesis of sexuality. S/m practitioners understood themselves to be reduced to silence and secrecy by feminism and the gay movement, and figured themselves as inhabiting a 'second closet'. For Rubin, Califia and other s/m practitioners, then, a second sexual taboo had to be broken by 'coming out' as a lesbian sadomasochist.28 But, as discussed in Chapter 2, 'coming out' is a 'coming into' discourse which works to avow and regulate the s/m subject's sexuality in a certain way. What I am suggesting here is that 'coming out' as a lesbian sadomasochist works to insert individuals into the regulatory regime of s/m discourse.

Lesbian s/m is a discursive regime with regulatory effects on its subjects precisely because of its formation against lesbian feminism. In contesting lesbian feminism's characterization of s/m as 'patriarchal' and therefore fundamentally domineering, coercive and violent, s/m constituted itself as the 'consensual exchange of power'.29 To be a subject of s/m, then, requires conformity to its highly regulated rules of engagement and

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27 Rubin, 'The Leather Menace', p.197.


29 The radical and lesbian feminist objections to s/m practitioners' claims that s/m is a consensual activity turns on three points: that it is not possible to freely choose within a relation of power or consent to a form of sexual desire which has been socially 'conditioned' (Young et.al., op.cit., pp.97-101; Norris, op.cit., p.106; Wagner, op.cit., pp.30-31; J. Nichols, D. Pagano and M. Rossoff, Is Sadomasochism Feminist? A Critique of the Samoite Position', in Linden et.al.(eds), op.cit., p.137; D. E. H. Russell, 'Sadomasochism: A Contra-Feminist Activity', in Linden et.al.(eds), op.cit., p.177; Jeffrey, The Lesbian Heresy, p.189; Miriam, op.cit., p.12); and that, anyway, because s/m is a profoundly alienated form of sexuality, and therefore inauthentic, the issue of consent is irrelevant (Young et.al., op.cit., p.110; Linden, op.cit., pp.4,7-9; K. Rian, 'Sadomasochism and the Social Construction of Desire', in Linden et.al.(eds), op.cit., p.49).

The proponents of s/m argue that if it is not consensual then it is not s/m and that, besides, it is the masochist who is in control by setting the limits to the scene. See Young et.al., op.cit., pp.97-98; Rubin, 'The Leather Menace', p.224; Rubin, 'Thinking Sex', p.304.
the ethical use of power. Within that normative regime, those who do not comply with safe words and safe sexual practices, for instance, are soon ostracised from the community. The disciplinary operations brought to bear by s/m's self-constitution as the consensual exchange of power are also apparent in the Samois editorial committee's negotiations on how s/m should be represented in *Coming to Power*. Not all articles submitted for publication portrayed s/m lesbians as 'strong, self-defining women', or the s/m experience as consensual, caring and safe. In the end, and because they could hardly condone censorship (being active in feminist anti-anti-pornography campaigns), the group's unease over several pieces was resolved by deploying a disclaimer: 'this is only a fantasy'.

Several implications flow from my characterization of the lesbian s/m debate as a relation of power and resistance, and the relationship between discourses of lesbian feminism and lesbian sadomasochism as one of discursive dependency. First, like the relationship of sexological discourse to 'the homosexual', lesbian feminism can be understood as one of the conditions of possibility for 'the lesbian sadomasochist'. I am suggesting that, in the same way that 'the sexual invert' and 'the lesbian' were necessary for nineteenth century sexology's production and stabilization of the normative category of 'woman', the 'lesbian sadomasochist', as a category of deviance produced by lesbian feminism, works to stabilize the normative category of 'lesbian feminist'. S/m is therefore not outside of, but is instead always already implicated in, the production of the 'true lesbian feminist': it is discursively located within in the regime that it ostensibly subverts. However, as I have indicated, and will return to later, like the category 'homosexual' and 'lesbian' vis-à-vis sexology, the construction of 'lesbian sadomasochist' within sex radical discourse has exceeded its lesbian feminist inscription.

A second implication of characterizing the lesbian s/m debate as a relation of power, resistance and discursive dependency is that, as the

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30 Rubin, 'The Leather Menace', p.205; Califia, *Public Sex*, p.168; Young et al., op.cit., p.88; Astuto and Califia, op.cit., pp.68-69. K. Davis, 'Introduction: What We Fear We Try to Keep Contained', in Samois (ed.), op.cit., pp.10-12 reports on negotiations within the Samois editorial committee on what would go in the book. Disagreements over interpretations of consent, what scenes may be objectionable on particular grounds and so on reveals the regulatory and disciplinary effects of lesbian s/m discourse.

That s/m in its contemporary formulation constitutes itself as a discipline which often in practice 'falls' around consent and the democratic exchange of power is demonstrated in Pat Califia's article, 'The limits of the S/M relationship, or Mr. Benson doesn't live here anymore', in M. Thompson (ed.), *Leatherfolk: Radical Sex, Politics, and Practice*, Boston, Alyson Publications, 1991, pp.221-232. Califia airs her discontents with the s/m scene and, in a position that comes close to Sheila Jeffreys' at that point, rails against the tendency of the s/m relationship to replicate old gender patterns.
'other' of each other, lesbian feminism and lesbian sadomasochism do not make sense alone. In terms of establishing and maintaining a coherent, stable identity, then, both sides have a stake in reiterating their difference from each other. What is also at stake in lesbian feminism's ongoing discursive production and reproduction of 'self' and 'other', 'true' and 'false' lesbian sex and the reinscription of difference is its 'regime of truth'. Sheila Jeffreys, for example, even after more than a decade of debate, still maintains that lesbian feminists hold the correct and "unimpeachable" position on sexual politics and practices.\(^{31}\) For their part, lesbian sadomasochists proclaim that "anti-S/M lesbian-feminist theorists correctly perceive us as a threat, but we are only a threat insofar as we are a threat to their status",\(^{32}\) that is, to lesbian feminists' status as the 'truth-sayers' on matters of lesbian sexuality.

The amount of work required to render the category of lesbian feminist internally coherent and stable for Biddy Martin\(^{33}\) is exacted at the cost of a more complex analysis of the social relations of fantasies, desires, pleasures and practices. The necessity for ongoing 'boundary control' of lesbian feminist identity exposes its instability and lack of fixed foundations as a category. It also exposes the fact of irreducible personal heterogeneities - what in lesbian feminists themselves is excessive to their identity. A resolution to the s/m debate, therefore, is not simply a matter of lesbian feminism re-evaluating its ethics and "own[ing] [its] 'illegitimate' children".\(^{34}\) As Rubin\(^{35}\) notes, for lesbian feminism to concede that lesbians doing s/m could be healthy and happy would be to shatter the image of s/m as the opposite of healthy lesbianism. Underlying lesbian feminists' hostility to critique and resistance to modification, therefore, is the fear of self de(con)struction.

In this section I have identified some of the meanings, discursive content, practices and positionings (against radical and lesbian feminism, for instance) that lesbians accede to when they take up the subject position of 'sadomasochist'. These meanings, practices and relationships

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\(^{31}\) Jeffreys, Anticlimax, p.293.

\(^{32}\) Davis, op.cit., p.8.


\(^{34}\) Davis, op.cit., p.13.

were shown to be historically contingent, emerging from within a dynamic flux of sexual politics and the social, political and discursive conditions of the late 1970s and early 1980s. In the next section I outline the key arguments in the lesbian feminist case against lesbian sadomasochism in more detail, highlighting those formulations that s/m discourse would seek to work against.

II. THE LESBIAN FEMINIST CASE AGAINST LESBIAN SADOMASOCHISM

Chapter 4 identified some points of radical and lesbian feminists' objection to sadomasochism. In this section I elucidate the conceptual basis of the argument against sadomasochism with primary reference to Sheila Jeffreys, whose writings on lesbian sadomasochism from 1984 onwards represent the most elaborated lesbian feminist (or, as it is known in Britain, 'revolutionary feminist') position. While I take Jeffreys' position to be paradigmatic, my exposition of the lesbian feminism critique of lesbian sadomasochism is supported in footnotes with references to two influential anthologies of the 1980s and 1990s, Against Sadomasochism and Unleashing Feminism.

The political is personal: the patriarchal construction of s/m

Cultural feminism, as I noted in Chapter 4, authorized its truth claims on women's sexuality through recourse to 'nature'. These claims sparked the 'sex wars' in which the debate on lesbian sadomasochism is located. It is ironic, then, that the lesbian feminist critique of lesbian sadomasochism should, in the main, proceed through a revision of earlier gender role theory. As earlier feminist theorists like Millett had demonstrated, role theory's utility lay in reconstituting as 'political' what were previously thought to be 'natural' phenomena: heterosexual relations, 'masculinity' and 'femininity', and the sexual division of labour. Once problematized through their de-naturalization, these phenomena could be analyzed as ideological constructs of patriarchy. As such, they could be challenged and overcome through political means. The utility of this approach to a critique of s/m lay in deauthorizing any claim that sadomasochists might
make as to the 'naturalness' of their sexual practice and in enabling the articulation of a political project to end sadomasochism. In doing so, however, the lesbian feminist critique of sadomasochism reintroduced the problematics of role theory and its conditioning thesis.

Jeffreys' critique of sadomasochism starts from lesbian feminism's maxim that the structural principle of heterosexuality is male domination and female submission and that this principle is exemplified in heterosexual intercourse. Following a line of thinking that can be traced from the Radicalesbians through Adrienne Rich and The Leeds Revolutionary Feminists (of which she was a member), Jeffreyes reiterates the claim that heterosexuality is not 'natural' or 'normal' to women but is, rather, a coercive political institution that serves male supremacy. Whereas Atkinson took heterosexual intercourse to be derived from material reproductive differences between the sexes, however, Jeffreyes takes heterosexual intercourse to be formulated through the patriarchal ideology of difference. This ideology, which to Jeffreyes posits 'natural' differences as the explanation for women's secondary social position, works to obscure the fact of power inequalities between the sexes.  

Power relations and material inequalities between men and women characterize the system of male domination. According to Jeffreyes, it is within this system that sexual desire is structured and learnt. Through gender trainings required by, and instituted under conditions of, a male supremacist order, sexual desire is also formed. Accordingly, men's sexual desire is structured around the eroticization of women's powerlessness while women's sexual desire is structured around eroticizing male power and their own subjection. Jeffreyes finds in this model of desire formation an explanation for feminists' complex and ambivalent responses to pornography and dominant and subordinate (s/m) images. Once conditioned to 'heterosexuality', women's subordination is 'sexy' for women as well as for men. On Jeffreyes' model, then, 'liberation' of s/m sexualities does not so much represent sexual freedom but the enactment of a conditioned compulsion which works to

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further enslave women to patriarchal ideology and their own subordination.\(^{37}\)

But how does 'heterosexual' (s/m) desire find its way into same-sex relations in which, Jeffreys claims, domination and subordination are not the structuring principles? According to her, although heterosexual desire originates in the power relations between men and women, lesbians and gay men, as subjects of a male supremacist social order, are also subject to trainings to 'heterosexuality'. As a result, heterosexually-trained lesbians and gay men can only be turned on erotically through the introduction of power differences into their sexual relations. This power difference can be in the form of age difference (paedophilia), race and class differences between the participants, or sexual practices which enact power differences, such as role playing (e.g. butch-femme) and sadomasochism.\(^{38}\)

The effects of heterosexual conditioning are not confined to the individual: the political is not just the personal. For Jeffreys, the enactment of the conditioned compulsions of 'heterosexuality', particularly by the 'avatars' of the feminist revolution - that is, lesbians - has dire political consequences.

**The personal is political: the political significance of s/m**

According to its critics, the promotion of sadomasochism has dangerous social and political implications for women. Besides the argument that s/m is anti-feminist by virtue of reinforcing the values of male domination and female submission, it is also claimed that s/m tacitly condones rape and sexual violence.\(^{39}\) As one critic put it: "S/m is tantamount to spitting in the faces of women who are struggling to be free".\(^{40}\) It is further

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\(^{40}\) Young et.al., op.cit., p.109.
claimed that s/m sexual practice strengthens the values that maintain all forms of oppression. Those who object to s/m argue that, even if consented to, s/m affirms that the abuse of people and violence is acceptable and that relations of power and domination are valid and perhaps inevitable.41 On this view, s/m is therefore implicated in political authoritarianism, fascism, racism, and even homophobia.42

Critics of s/m have attempted to draw a parallel between the rise of the political right in the U.S. and the U.K. in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and the apparent growth in popularity and acceptability of s/m. As purportedly representing a retreat from egalitarianism, s/m is seen by lesbian feminists as patriarchy's counter-revolutionary strategy par excellence. Jeffreys predicts that through the desensitization to pain and suffering effected through s/m practices, s/m practitioners' political sensitivities will be blunted to the point where they will be incapable of resisting political tyranny. While she concedes that s/m practitioners may not themselves be political fascists, Jeffreys nevertheless asserts: 'It is very hard to fight what turns you on'.43 But, she suggests, perhaps this is precisely the political function of s/m. Even the acceptance of sadomasochism as a legitimate form of sexuality by those who are not its practitioners poses a political danger. For Jeffreys, the acceptance of s/m, like the German people's acceptance of Nazism, heralds the first step to political tyranny.44


In attempting to construct an ontological relation between political fascism and sadomasochism, Jeffreys (The Lesbian Heresy, p.174) equates Nazi torture methods used on homosexuals in concentration camps to s/m sexual practices then and now. In one graphic example, Jeffreys attempts to equate fistfucking with Nazi torturers' showing a broom handle into the rectum of a camp inmate. S/m practices, she concludes, are derived from, and are nothing more than the replication of, techniques used in the historical oppression of homosexual men and women.


44 Ibid., pp.171-172,181,187. Here Jeffreys attempts to equate the sexually permissive era of post-World War I Berlin, especially its s/m scene, with Germans' acceptance of Nazism (pp.172-179). See also Penelope, Call Me Lesbian, pp.79-80,113.
Given these purported political dangers, s/m practitioners therefore represent to lesbian feminists a 'fifth column' within lesbianism. Lesbianism's status as the feminist vanguard is said to be weakened by the presence of lesbian sadomasochists who, it is claimed, reproduce rather than contest male supremacist culture. As one incredulous observer put it:

Why would lesbian-feminists who are fighting to destroy the power contradictions of sexism and heterosexism choose to create and heighten power contradictions between themselves in their sexuality?\(^{45}\)

Further, critics claim that in suggesting that power relations are a matter of consent, and that dominant and subordinate roles are readily reversible, s/m practitioners work to undermine the feminist analysis of structural relations of power between men and women. There seems to be a general concern that, if feminists concede that power inequality is an inherent part of the human condition, as they would have to in order to accept s/m as a legitimate sexual practice, then the feminist project is futile. Lesbian feminists further believe that, if lesbianism is compromised in these ways, then the whole feminist project might collapse.\(^{46}\)

Given the dire personal and political consequences accorded to the practice of s/m, critics of s/m assert that feminists have a political responsibility to resist and fight s/m on both a personal and political level. Predictably, for lesbian feminists, women's liberation demands the destruction of heterosexual desire in all its manifestations.

**The lesbian feminist political solution - eroticize equality**

Lesbian feminists' characterization of s/m desire as an effect of erotic trainings within social relations of male domination and female submission suggests that desire is amenable to deconditioning and reconstruction. Accordingly, Jeffreys' political programme calls for no less than a transformation of desire from 'heterosexual' to 'homosexual'

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\(^{45}\) Wagner, op.cit., p.34.

\(^{46}\) Norris, op.cit., p.106.
forms. This transformation involves a conscious choice to refuse undesirable forms of sex (all literal or metaphorical 'heterosexual' sex) and the simultaneous construction of 'homosexual' desire: an erotics of equal power and mutuality. Like Atkinson's inconclusive speculations on sex after patriarchy, Jeffreys' specification of 'homosexual' practice is vague. Because it is constituted against the category 'heterosexuality' in which masculinity, sex and violence are conflated, Jeffreys' practice of 'homosexuality' (as she herself concedes) may not look like 'sex' at all.\(^7\)

The conditioning model that Jeffreys revivifies, as noted in Chapter 3, presents the problem of women and lesbians being so conditioned to 'heterosexuality' that they cannot see that it is a problem which can be overcome. What, then, is the basis of resistance to heterosexuality and male domination? Again, as in role theory, the answer suggests a vanguardism invested in lesbian feminists. For Jeffreys, training to heterosexual desire is not complete and absolute. Some women have therefore already experienced 'homosexual' desire, as Jeffreys envisages it, through a type of lesbian practice which eroticizes mutuality and equality. This experience is possible because some lesbians have managed to remain unaffected by s/m ('heterosexuality') and are able to practice a different kind of sexuality. It is lesbian feminist separatists who, in already practicing 'homosexual' desire, are creating a society that is not structured by heterosexuality and demonstrating how a world beyond heterosexuality is possible.\(^8\)

While Jeffreys stops short of repeating The Leeds Revolutionary Feminist Group's call for all women to become lesbians, put forward in a 1979 paper, she nevertheless essentially reiterates their argument for political lesbianism. This argument ranges in intensity from a call to women to develop their 'homosexual' responses while gradually shutting down those which are about eroticizing their subordination, to an invitation to "choose, as many of us have done, to work towards

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\(^7\) Jeffreys, Anticlimax, pp.299,301-302,312,315. See also Jay, The Spirit Is Liberationist but the Flesh Is...; pp.212-213; Rian, op.cit., pp.45,48-49; Wagner, op.cit., p.49.

homosexual desire if that suits our lives and relationships."⁴⁹ to a demand that sexual life conform to a feminist political commitment.

Jeffreys is at her most coercive in insisting that women cannot be free if they are practicing 'unfreedom' in the bedroom, and by constituting as 'serious' feminists only those feminists and lesbians who have given up 'heterosexual' desire, that is, have given up sex with men or s/m sexual practice. For her, the most important political and ethical choice in the present circumstances comes down to a choice between sexual passion (which, to Jeffreys, means taking pleasure in women's lack of freedom) and the desire to be free: "The question we have to ask ourselves is whether we want our freedom or whether we want to retain heterosexual desire. Feminists will choose freedom".⁵⁰ Similarly, in response to a questioner's criticism that her argument against s/m violates a central tenet of feminism (the right to choose what one will do with one's own body), Jeffreys reportedly retorted that "Personal freedom is not the sort of concept that would fit into my view about what we can do around sexuality".⁵¹ Those who do not see the truth of lesbian feminism's 'unimpeachable' position on sexual practice are standing in the path of the feminist revolution and, as such, according to Jeffreys, are agents of the male ruling class.⁵²

Jeffreys anticipates that her political programme to end 'heterosexual' desire will attract objections similar to those raised by heterosexual feminists in response to the publication of the Leeds Revolutionary Feminist Group's paper. She therefore proposes that 'homosexual' desire can be incorporated into an opposite-sex relationship. However, this would only be possible in a society where men do not dominate women. Because this is not the present situation, the implication of Jeffreys' proposal is that sexual relations between men and women are irredeemable, at least for now. Hence, Jeffreys' objects to heterosexual

⁴⁹ Jeffreys, Anticlimax, p.315 (see also p.313); Jeffreys, The Lesbian Heresy, p.189. Jeffreys also believes that male sexuality, both heterosexual and homosexual, must be reconstructed and its linking of power, aggression and sexual pleasure broken (Anticlimax, pp.312-313).

⁵⁰ Jeffreys, Anticlimax, p.314.


feminists' attempts to restructure heterosexual relations on the grounds that such activity constitutes a retrograde step.53

Jeffreys' critique of lesbian sadomasochism, as essentially a reworking of role theory and its conditioning thesis, reintroduces the problematics of early radical and lesbian feminism: a rationalist model of subjectivity which privileges mind over the body, the (re)production of a lesbian feminist 'regime of truth' on sexuality, and a feminist vanguardism invested in lesbian feminists. What is of central importance in the context of the debate on lesbian sadomasochism, however, is her conceptual commitment to the principle of identity (A=A) in promoting the idea that relations of equality are only possible between 'the same' (in her scheme, 'sameness' of power). This leads to an assertion that only 'homosexual desire' can claim to represent a 'feminist', egalitarian desire. Jeffreys' category of 'homosexual desire', however, excludes homosexuals whose practices enact differences of power (butch-femme and s/m lesbians, for instance). It is these conceptual formulations - that relations of difference necessarily signify relations of domination, and that 'egalitarian' homosexual desire constitutes 'feminist' desire - that sex radical discourses seek to challenge and undermine.

III. THE DISCOURSES OF LESBIAN S/M

Debates over s/m on grounds of consent and its aetiology, noted previously, soon reached an impasse. The more significant and complex responses to the lesbian feminist case against sadomasochism, generated by writers such as Gayle Rubin drawing on Foucault, worked at the level of challenging the fundamental principles of radical and lesbian feminism. In this section, I identify the discursive moves employed by Rubin and others to contest the epistemological grounds of the lesbian feminist critique of s/m and explore some of their implications. In particular, I argue that, despite their stated allegiance to a Foucauldian framework, proponents of lesbian s/m tend to reassert a repressive hypothesis of sexuality. This in turn generates the familiar problematics

53 Ibid., pp.307-308. Jeffreys reassertion of political lesbianism is also a response to heterosexual feminists' contestation of earlier lesbian feminists' critiques of heterosexuality. Heterosexuality was one of the sites of the 'sex ware'.
of a privileged relation between truth and sexuality and, in some cases, a vanguardism invested in s/m practitioners.

**Undoing 'the personal is the political': lesbianism as sex, not politics**

What is a lesbian? A lesbian is the rage of all women condensed to the point of explosion. (Radicaledians 1970)\(^{54}\)

A lesbian is the lust of all women condensed to the point of explosion. (On Our Backs 1986)\(^{55}\)

The radical feminist maxim 'the personal is the political', along with the conceptual conflation of gender and sexuality, provided the grounds for a critique of lesbian sadomasochism. Lesbian feminists insisted that personal sexual practice must conform to feminist political ideals of egalitarianism based on 'sameness' - specifically, equal power. This lesbian feminist ideal of sexual relations was promoted as the model for egalitarian relationships. One critical counter-move employed by sex radicals, therefore, was unravelling the nexus forged between the personal and political in its specific manifestation of lesbianism as a privileged feminist identity.

Gayle Rubin's objections to lesbian feminist discourses of sexuality rested on several grounds. First, the characterization of lesbianism as a feminist political practice produced troubling anachronisms. For example, on the lesbian feminist definition, heterosexual women, non-movement, s/m and butch/femme lesbians could not be feminists. On the other hand, lesbian feminists' characterization of lesbianism as 'woman identification' meant that women who were not necessarily sexually attracted to women could identify as 'lesbian'. Rubin argued that, in conflating lesbianism (a sexual and erotic experience) with feminism (a political philosophy), it was impossible to justify lesbianism on grounds other than feminism. This, she claimed, had two consequences. In identifying more with feminism than with the broader lesbian community, lesbian feminism

\(^{54}\) Radicaledians, 'The Woman Identified Woman', p.17.

\(^{55}\) Cited in Jeffreys, The Lesbian Heresy, p.28.
obscured the fact that lesbians are oppressed for their sexuality, not just their gender. It also meant that feminists had difficulty allowing themselves or others to enjoy lesbian lust or erotic experience.  

Rubin's second objection to lesbian feminism, therefore, was that it denied lesbianism as a sexual experience. She described as 'feminism' those discourses, including radical (anti-pornography) and lesbian feminism, which characterized sexuality as a male value and activity. Rubin rejected lesbian feminists' determinations on what constituted 'feminist' sexual practice, cuttingly referring to 'vanilla' sex as "the missionary position of the women's movement".

Rubin's resistance to lesbian feminist discourse on lesbian sexuality consisted of contesting its representation of lesbianism as a privileged feminist position. This demanded disentangling feminist political identification from sexual identification as a lesbian, a tactic which also enabled Rubin to delegitimize political lesbianism and 'reclaim' lesbianism for 'lesbians': those women who sexually desire other women. For Rubin, lesbianism is about sex and lesbian desire, no more, no less. Pat Califia too refuted lesbian feminists' claim that lesbianism constituted a paradigmatic feminist relationship, instead promoting it as "a way that two women could give pleasure to one other". Expanding women's sexual options through s/m practice and challenging lesbian feminists' confining conception of lesbian sexuality was to Rubin a necessary corrective to what she saw as the conservative, 'anti-sex' direction of the women's movement at the time.

When refigured by sex radicals as implicated in a resurgence of political repression of sexual minorities, lesbian feminists found themselves characterized as sexual prudes, indeed, 'erotophobic'. Lesbian feminists' attitude towards s/m and other stigmatized sexual

58 English, Hollibaugh, Rubin, op.cit., p.44.
60 Rubin, 'The Leather Menace', p.217; Rubin, 'Thinking Sex', p.301.
61 Califia, Public Sex, p.16, for instance, accuses Adrienne Rich of being afraid of lesbian lust.
practices was recast as one of erotic chauvinism.\textsuperscript{62} Against the lesbian feminist claim that s/m was closely aligned with political fascism, it was lesbian feminists' position that was now problematized as conservative and authoritarian.\textsuperscript{63}

While this reformulation of the relationship between lesbian feminists and sex radicals in terms of a 'repressive hypothesis' of s/m sexuality may have worked to problematize lesbian feminism's 'regime of truth' on sexuality, it also worked to introduce the familiar problematics of sexual liberation discourses. A repressive hypothesis of s/m sexuality also cut across Rubin's attempt to reconstitute lesbianism as a sexual practice without political significance, for s/m sexuality could now be taken to constitute a privileged site for sexual dissent.

A tension between the repressive hypothesis' conception of a natural (s/m) libido yearning to be free and a conscious self-positioning in a category of vanguard sexual dissent is particularly marked in Califia's writings. Califia claimed to have been acting on her sexual fantasies when she came out as a sadomasochist after many years as a sexually repressed 'vanilla' lesbian separatist. However, she also claims to have made the choice to position herself most marginally in order to take up the most radical position in relation to contemporary society's normative sexual regime.\textsuperscript{64} Califia has chosen to locate herself and her politics in the gay community rather than the lesbian community "because that's where the sexual fringe starts to unravel".\textsuperscript{65}

The modes of sex Califia engages in also seem to be more a matter of conscious choice of rebellion against the normative sexual regime than 'natural' desire:

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{62} Rubin, 'Thinking Sex', p.306.
\textsuperscript{63} The lesbian feminist response to sex radicals' moves to depoliticize then resexualize lesbianism is to counter with a desexualizing and repoliticizing of lesbianism: that is, to reforge the link between sex and feminist politics, the personal and the political. This in practice meant restating the radical lesbian feminist position and reasserting political lesbianism. See, for instance, Raymond, 'Putting the Politics Back Into Lesbianism'. For a more general retaliation against the feminist rethinking on sexuality, see D. Leicholdt and J. Raymond (eds), \textit{The Sexual Liberals and the Attack on Feminism}, New York, Pergamon Press, 1990.
\textsuperscript{64} Califia, \textit{Public Sex}, p.23
\textsuperscript{65} Ibid., p.158.
\end{footnotesize}
S/m is scary. That's at least half its significance. We select the most frightening, disgusting, or unacceptable activities and transmute them into pleasure. We make use of all the forbidden symbols and all the disowned emotions, S/m is a deliberate, premeditated, erotic blasphemy. It is a form of sexual extremism and sexual dissent.66

My suggestion here is that in the 1980s, like political lesbianism in the 1970s before it, 'lesbian sadomasochist' and 'sex radical' were subject positions that in the political context of the time represented the vanguard positions in sexual politics, hence their allure.67 In this sense, Pat Califia's self-positioning as a 'sex radical' is akin to political lesbianism in terms of the political investments of its subjects. Lesbianism and lesbian s/m, then, were not 'just sex', even in discourses of s/m.

The strategic value in breaking the nexus forged by lesbian feminists between lesbianism and feminism lay in delegitimizing lesbian feminists' 'truth' claims on lesbian sexuality. Subverting this defining trope of lesbian feminism (lesbianism as a privileged feminist identity) produced the additional benefit, at least for sex radicals, of conceptually separating sexuality (sexual practice) and gender (sexual difference). As I show in the next section, this enabled sex radicals to carve out a new domain of 'sexuality' and seize the initiative in sexual theory.

Sexuality and gender as separate analytic domains

Constituting sexuality and gender as distinct analytic domains was, for Rubin, a move designed to:

challenge the assumption that feminism is or should be the privileged site of a theory of sexuality. Feminism is the theory of gender oppression. To automatically assume that this makes it

66 Ibid., p.158.

67 Like cultural feminism's ascendency through a mass defection from the 'androgyne' project, lesbian sadomasochism gained prominence, in part, through defections from lesbian feminism. Rubin, 'The Leather Menace', p.222, refers to these women as 'refugees from Lesbian Nation'.
the theory of sexual oppression is to fail to distinguish between
gender, on the one hand, and erotic desire, on the other.\

Rubin argues that, while much of the oppression of women is borne by,
mediated through and constituted within sexuality, this does not mean
that gender and sexuality are the same thing. Rather, gender and
sexuality have become identified with each other through the semantic
conflation of the two meanings of the word 'sex': sexual activity and
sexual difference. In feminist theory, according to Rubin, this conflation
of the two meanings of 'sex' has led to the idea that a theory of sexuality
can be derived from a theory of gender. When this occurs, feminist
theorizing on sexuality often reproduces the worst traditions of
conservative, moralistic, anti-sex discourse. For Rubin, feminist thought
lacks the angles of vision that can grasp and assess power relations in
the area of sexuality. Here, she singles out cultural and lesbian
feminism's stance against pornography, prostitution, sadomasochism,
transsexuality and cross-generational sex.\

The value of Foucault's work, for Rubin, is its demonstration that
sexuality as a system and an institution has its own autonomous history
of emergence and transformation. Like other social institutions, sexuality
is imbued with conflicts of interest, internal hierarchical ordering and
political manoeuvring in relation to its regulation. It is subject to periods
where meanings, values and sexual conduct are sharply contested and
renegotiated. While the development of this sexual system has taken
place in the context of hierarchical relations of gender, sexuality and
gender are for Rubin separate social formations. As such, gender and
sexuality are analytically separable although, she adds (somewhat
ambiguously), that feminism's critique of gender hierarchy must
eventually be incorporated into a radical theory of sex.\

In promoting an autonomous theory and politics of sexuality, Rubin
staked out a domain that was to be the proper object of a radical theory

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69 Ibid., pp.283,300-304,307-309. Rubin adds that she, too, has been guilty of this semantic conflation, failing to
distinguish between 'lust' and 'gender' and treating both as modalities of the same underlying social processes.
Here she is referring to her influential 1975 essay 'The Traffic in Women' in which she proposed the intimate
linking of gender and sexuality in a 'sex/gender' system. See also English, Hollibaugh, Rubin, op.cit., p.42.
of sex. Such a theory of sex would be spearheaded by representatives of the 'pro-sex', sexual liberation tradition of feminism. Radical theorists of sex, according to Rubin, would be found among those lesbians whose sexuality does not conform with lesbian feminist standards of 'sexual purity' (s/m and butch/femme lesbians, for example), as well as among heterosexual feminists and 'classic' radical feminists.  

The function of Rubin's radical theory of sex is to:  

identify, describe, explain and denounce erotic injustice and sexual oppression... [It must] build rich descriptions of sexuality as it exists in society and history.  

For Rubin, then, a radical theory of sex must be empirically grounded in the tradition of sexology and should take an anthropological view of different sexual cultures. Following Foucault, Rubin rejects sexual essentialism - the idea of sexuality as natural libido trying to break free of social constraint - and instead posits the forms sexuality takes historically to be human constructions and thus amenable to political analysis.  

Much of Rubin's work is concerned with documenting the recent history of the social repression of, and interventions in, stigmatized sexual practices and populations. She analyzes the current distribution and ranking of sexual forms as they occur in contemporary society and within feminism. Of most concern to her are punitive laws and state harassment of stigmatized erotic minorities, accounts of which build up her case for the injustice of normalizing sexual regimes. Rubin's arguments here are her most cogent and persuasive, as is her call for feminists to examine their own normalizing operations and develop a more sophisticated analysis and understanding of sexuality.  

In separating gender and sexuality, Rubin, following Foucault, constitutes sexuality as a discursive domain with its own history of formation, transformation and struggle. Through this discursive move,
sexuality is imbued with a political dynamic independent of, and sometimes against, feminism. In the next section I outline Rubin's articulation of a sexual politics independent of feminist precepts.

The politics of s/m

In carving out an autonomous discursive domain of sexuality, Rubin replicated the strategy of early radical feminists in separating from the New Left. Radical feminists had claimed that relations between the sexes constituted a distinct social formation independent of class relations which demanded an autonomous, feminist sexual politics ('gender' politics in Rubin's terminology). Similarly, Rubin's promotion of sexuality as another autonomous vector of oppression justified separate organizing and theorizing around the politics of sexuality, independent of gender relations and feminism.

Rubin's unravelling of the nexus forged by radical feminists between the personal and the political effectively re-established the public/private distinction and reinstated an oppositional relationship between sex and power. To her, personal behaviours are political only to the extent that sexuality has historically been the subject of public concern and intervention. Accordingly, sexual politics, realigned with the public domain in the separation of public and private, is refigured in sex radical discourses as the struggle between individuals' private concerns and rights, and oppressive state apparatuses.

The New Right, on the ascendant in the U.K. and U.S. in the late 1970s, was focussing its anti-gay campaign on the most unpopular and therefore most vulnerable minorities within the gay community: paedophiles and s/m 'leathermen'. Sex radicals countered the charge that sadomasochism represented the personal expression of political fascism by pointing out that s/m, rather than being aligned to the political

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74 For an account of state harassment and persecution of homosexuals and other sexual minorities in the U.S. see Rubin, 'Leather Menace' and 'Thinking Sex'; Califia, Public Sex, passim; Adam, op.cit., pp.109-115. For similar events in the British context, see Weeks, Sex, Politics and Society, Chapter 14; Sexuality and its Discontents, Chapter 3; Evans, op.cit.; D. Cooper, Sexing the City. Lesbians and Gay Politics Within the Activist State, London, Rivers Oram Press, 1994. At the same time, and throughout the 1980s, Australia was experiencing a relatively benign regime of social-democratic Federal and (majority of) State Labor governments, though see Wotherspoon, City of the Plain, and Thompson, Flaws in the Social Fabric.
Right, was, instead, one of its targets. It was radical and lesbian feminists, not sadomasochists, they claimed, who demonstrated a dangerous erotophobic alignment with political and moral conservatism.76

 Rubin claimed that the campaign against sadomasochism, paedophilia and gay pornography, like the 'lesbian-baiting' of the women's movement a decade earlier, was being used to drive a wedge into the gay movement. The gay and women's movements responded to the Right's attacks by distancing themselves from paedophiles and s/m practitioners. This defensive move prompted Rubin's comment that "The campaign against the leather menace has succeeded where the attack on the lavender menace failed".76 She further argued that, because of their own experiences in the women's movement, lesbian feminists should be alert and sensitive to such divisive strategies and should therefore support sexual minorities politically. Rubin's consistent line in this regard is that feminists ought to be more concerned over state persecution of minorities than over what consenting adults did in the privacy of their bedroom (or dungeon). After all, she asserted, "of what possible social significance is it if a person likes to masturbate over a shoe".77

 Rubin's political answer to the problem of persecution of sexual minorities is the establishment of a pluralistic sexual ethics. This, she believes, can only come about through rejecting a single ideal standard of sexuality and instituting instead the notion of 'benign sexual variation', a concept she legitimizes through recourse to nature (the doctrine of natural variation).78 In practice, a pluralistic sexual ethics means that sex acts should only be judged "by the way partners treat one another, the level of mutual consideration, the presence or absence of coercion, and the quality and quantity of the pleasures they provide".79

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76 Rubin, 'The Leather Menace', p.213. See also Califia, 'A Personal View . . . .', p.264. The epithet 'The Leather Menace' parodied N.O.W.'s attempt to purge 'the lavender menace' (i.e. lesbians) from their ranks in the early 1970s. N.O.W. in fact was successfully 'bailed' by the campaign against paedophiles and the s/m community. In 1980 N.O.W. resolved that pederasty, pornography, sadomasochism and public sex did not constitute lesbian/gay rights issues (see Heresies No.12, 1981)

77 Rubin, 'Thinking Sex', p.310.


79 Rubin, 'Thinking Sex', p.283.
By the concept of 'benign sexual variation', Rubin does not mean to promote a liberal 'tolerance' of erotic non-conformists which leaves the sexual standard intact. Rather, 'benign sexual variation' is more akin to 'cultural relativism', a concept which works to problematize and delegitimize the norms and 'truth' claims of dominant groups in particular. She casts as quasi-ethnic groups sexual minorities who, at the time of her writing, were beginning to emulate the success of homosexuals in forming communities and acquiring identities as a means to lay claim to social space and belonging. The effect of Rubin's 'anthropologizing' strategy (borrowed from her disciplinary background) is to render objectors to sexual minorities as cultural chauvinists, akin to racists. Given the success of black, ethnic and gay identity politics in the 1970s, within the then-dominant liberal pluralist political climate, Rubin's deployment of 'multicultural' discourse on behalf of persecuted sexual communities was a politically astute move.

Rubin's argument against lesbian feminism, through which her discourse on s/m is constructed, rests on the disarticulation of sexuality and gender, of sexual politics and feminist politics and of the personal and the political. However, the move to disarticulate the personal and the political reinstates a series of related distinctions. These include a distinction between public and private, where power is vested in the public (that is, the political realm and the state), as well as between nature and culture where 'desire' is construed to reside in nature. In the absence of any qualifiers at the time of her assertions, Rubin's strategic deployment of the rhetoric of sexual liberation ('coming out'), her assertion of the concept of natural 'benign variation', her characterization of the relation between sex and power as one of opposition (the repressive power of the state acting on individual sexual subjects) and of the repressive power of the state as itself motivated by 'erotophobia', together establish the conditions for a repressive hypothesis of sexuality (libido).

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80 Ibid., p.287.
82 The tendency to understand s/m desire as natural or 'just there' is much more marked in other proponents of s/m. See for example Young et.al., op.cit., pp.88,90,94,96.
However, Rubin's work also manifests a tension between 'nature' and 'culture' in the simultaneous deployment of the concept of 'benign variation', with its naturalistic overtones, and the concept of 'cultural relativism', in which "desires are not preexisting biological entities, but rather, they are constituted in the course of historically specific social practices". Her recourse to a notion of natural variation sits uncomfortably alongside Foucauldian-inspired claims that "all sexuality [is] constructed" unless, of course, she simply takes the meaning of sexuality to be constructed. This is a critical point of interpretation, a discussion to which I will return.

The tension between 'nature' and 'culture' also manifests in Rubin's simultaneous promotion of two projects: an anthropological sexology which would catalogue erotic and sexual variation (but which, from a Foucauldian perspective would constitute an operation of sexological 'species formation' in itself), and her parallel project of analysing the historical formation, and the state's subsequent persecution, of those categories.

Rubin's move to constitute a 'sex radical' project through the demonstrated political utility of gay liberation's discursive and political strategies may have been motivated by the urgency of the political task of mobilizing resistance against the state's persecution of sexual minorities in the gay community. However, this approach also worked to set a repressive hypothesis of sexuality circulating within sex radical discourse. A repressive hypothesis of sexuality presents the possibility of taking s/m desire and identity to represent the truth of the self. While Rubin herself does not promote such a view, in some discourses of s/m the presence of a repressive hypothesis of sexuality leads to the assertion of a vanguardism invested in sex radicalism and s/m practice, as I now go on to show.

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84 Rubin, 'Thinking Sex', p.276. See also her discussion on the social structuring of fantasy in English, Hollibaugh, Rubin, op.cit., p.47

85 Rubin, 'Thinking Sex', p.306.

86 For examples of both projects, see Rubin, 'Thinking Sex', pp.275-277, 284-285.
Sex radicals as the new political vanguard

Rubin took the state's persecution of sexual minorities to be symptomatic of the 'fallacy of misplaced scale' (burdening sex with an excess of significance in terms of its perceived threat to civilization) and the 'domino theory of sexual peril' (that the acceptance of stigmatized sexual practices like sadomasochism, will be the first step to chaos and anarchy). Calafia too took this persecution as proof that there was something about those sexual practices that threatened the established order. However, deploying Reichian discourses of sexual liberation (discussed in Chapter 2) in her defence of s/m, Calafia, in contrast to Rubin's position that sex is overburdened with significance in terms of the threat it poses, claims instead that "we've been browbeaten into thinking sex isn't that important". S/m, to Calafia, recognizes the erotic underpinnings of the social order we live in. Following Reich, she takes all forms of authoritarianism to be premised on the repression of sexuality: "There's an enormous hard-on beneath the priest's robe, the cop's uniform, the president's business suit, the soldier's khakis". The political significance of s/m, then, to Calafia, lies in its capacity to expose and subvert the secret sexual nature of authority through the parodic use of uniforms in its reclamation and celebration of sex.

For Calafia, s/m is type of sexual practice which allows the expression and integration of hidden and secret desires and of repressed aspects of libido. Accordingly, s/m to her is a normal part of women's sexuality. All women, therefore, are potential 'sex radicals'. In promoting a Reichian repressive hypothesis, Calafia is much closer than Rubin to the dominant conceptions of sexuality held by proponents of s/m. Her commitment to Reich also leads Calafia to make greater claims for the liberatory potential of s/m. Calafia believes the repressive authoritarian regime of sexuality can be overcome through a sex-positive propaganda campaign (based on a 'true knowledge' of sexuality). She also believes that the removal of

87 Ibid., pp.276-279, 282-283.
88 Calafia, Public Sex, p.152.
89 Ibid., p.163.
90 Ibid., pp.163-164,170.
91 Ibid., pp.23,155; Calafia, 'A Personal View . . . ', p.247; Lucy, op.cit., p.33 similarly asserts the 'naturalness' of s/m, claiming "I have not yet met a lesbian who did not have these roles in her". See also M. Thompson, 'Introduction', in Thompson (ed.), op.cit., xvii-xviii.
sexual restrictions would see an explosion of sexual deviation: "For the first time we'd get to take a look at what's really inside the Pandora's Box of human sexuality". For Califia, this new sexual freedom will usher in a radical change in society.

Following the Reichian model, some proponents of s/m claim that there is close connection between an interest in s/m and opposition to political power and injustice. The justifications for this claim range from observations that those who value freedom most tend to be into s/m, to assertions as to s/m's capacity to yield insight into the impulses to power and submission in oneself and to provide a way to integrate them. The practice of s/m, it is claimed, therefore removes a person's need to oppress others socially and politically. Conversely, it is claimed the person who is not sexually free is a danger, politically. Not fully understanding themselves, people who have not fully explored their sexuality (that is, have not engaged in s/m practices), cannot be trusted to make wise political decisions.

It was not such a big step from constituting s/m practitioners as sexually liberated and therefore, on Reich's model, resistant to political tyranny, to proclaiming their vanguard political status. One proponent, for instance, asserted that, as the final frontier of the struggle against sexual repression, s/m liberation would secure freedom for all against erotic tyranny. Califia claimed the fight for the sexual freedom of sexual minorities was a fight for the sexual rights of all women. Feminists, she argued, should therefore be applauding sex radicals' efforts, not condemning them. Practitioners like Califia claimed for s/m a privileged understanding of the true nature of the present sexual regime. For Califia, 'outlaw sexualities' have the 'outsider's' critical perspective on marriage, the family, heterosexuality, gender roles and vanilla sex. Given this insight, and because their sexual practices represent a more 'truthful'

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92 Califia, *Public Sex*, p.152.
93 Young et al., op.cit., p.104; M. Thompson, 'Introduction', xvii.
94 Young et al., op.cit., p.106.
95 lbid., p.106.
96 Califia, 'A Personal View . . . ', p.283.
form of sexuality, for Califia it is the sexual deviant who can speak most honestly about sex.\textsuperscript{97}

The liberatory potential of s/m

Sadomasochism, like lesbianism before it, assumed a liberatory political significance through discourses of sexual liberation. But, through claims that it also represented the true nature of human sexuality, sadomasochism could be constituted as a personal liberatory sexual experience \textit{par excellence}. At their most modest, claims for the liberatory effects of practicing s/m centred on the beneficial, health-giving properties of sexual release (Reich’s ‘orgiastic potency’). In contrast to charges made of its pathogenic effects, s/m proponents instead proclaimed its cathartic, healing and psychologically integrative effects.\textsuperscript{98} Far from being abusive, s/m promised (even demanded for its proper practice) new depths of intimacy, trust, communication, love and honesty. In this way, s/m recommended itself to everyone.\textsuperscript{99} At their most inflated, liberatory claims of s/m rested on an argument that, being only about pleasure and thus furthest removed from immanence (reproduction), s/m practice represents a more evolved form of sexuality. As a higher evolutionary form, and therefore representing a more complex and aesthetic mode of sexual behaviour, s/m supposedly manifests more in creative and highly imaginative people.\textsuperscript{100}

When figured as the ‘truth’ of sex, s/m can be promoted as a self-revelatory practice. Its purported closeness to the life force, because of its ‘rawness’, can bring its practitioners to the truth of self. Nothing can be hidden from the self or partners in the practice of s/m, according to its exponents. Humiliation can serve as a means of stripping away the ego and its defences and pretentions. Claims that s/m can reveal the self to the self parallels those made for lesbianism in terms of its ‘enlightening’

\textsuperscript{97} Califia, \textit{Public Sex}, p.11.


\textsuperscript{99} See Sanois (ed.), op.cit., pp.36-37,62,107,190; Young et.al., op.cit., p.109. This sort of recommendation is precisely what Jeffreys objects to. \textit{The Lesbian Heresy} is a diatribe against the incitement to s/m sex by many (including lesbian) sex therapists.

\textsuperscript{100} Young et.al., op.cit., p.95. Wagner, op.cit., p.33, cites a passage from an s/m publication which expresses similar sentiments.
effects. Like lesbian feminism’s repressive hypothesis before it, the sex
radical repressive hypothesis promotes s/m as the means to discover the
‘real self’.101

S/m proponents claim that, like religious and other practices of self,
s/m also evinces a capacity to induce transcendent states. Through
pushing the limits of physical endurance, crossing boundaries and losing
control (sometimes with the assistance of drugs), practitioners have
reportedly experienced an altered state of consciousness.102 This comes
close to Foucault’s own conception of s/m as a ‘limit experience’ (one
involving breaching the boundaries separating the conscious and
unconscious, reason and unreason, pleasure and pain, truth and falsity)
by which the self may be transformed.103

But if these claims are taken not to represent the ‘truth’ of s/m, but
rather new meanings of s/m formed in a resistive relation to its
pathologization in lesbian feminist and broader normalizing sexual
discourses, then the productive aspects of s/m discourses can be
highlighted. Like ‘coming out’ as a homosexual, ‘coming out’ as a
sadomasochist can be understood as an organized ritual of confession
which is implicated in the broader deployment of sexuality. If the ‘taboo’
on homosexuality was the condition of its incitement to discourse through
the purportedly liberating mechanism of coming out,104 the taboo on s/m
functions in the same way. Certainly, coming out as a sadomasochist is
understood by its practitioners to represent the revelation and liberation
of a deeper, more secret ‘truth’ of one’s sexual desires and, by
implication, one’s ‘truer’ self. But the highly eroticized extraction of this

101 Lucy, op.cit., p.38; Young et.al., op.cit., p.91; Samols (ed.), op.cit., pp.94,184,190; T. Portillo, ‘I get real:
102 Samols (ed.), op.cit., pp.31,42-43,58,107,138,186,193; Califia, Public Sex, pp.166,171; Young et.al., op.cit.,
op.cit., pp.171-174. Califia (Public Sex, p.238) reports on a growing spiritualization of s/m practice, akin to tantric sex, in the context of AIDS, although
the transcendent impulse, implicated in ‘truth’ claims of s/m, could have also motivated this development, as it did
in cultural feminism. Many articles in Leatherfolk are concerned with the spiritual aspects of s/m.
Oxford University Press, 1995, pp.95,87 and J. Simons, Foucault and the Political, London and New York,
Routledge, 1995, pp.98-101. on Foucault’s view on pleasure’s (particularly, s/m’s) capacity to induce a
transformative shattering of identity and subjectivity. Simons characterizes Foucault’s ‘limit experiences’ and
‘ecstatic moments’ as an impulse to transcendence.
104 Foucault, The History of Sexuality, p.80. See also B. Creet, ‘Daughter of the Movement: The Psychodynamics
159 for a psychoanalytic account of s/m as a breaking sexual taboo imposed by the ‘symbolic mother’: feminism.
'truth' under (albeit ritualized) conditions of duress also suggests a new development and extension of reach of what Foucault called the "perpetual spirals of power and pleasure"\textsuperscript{105} through which power draws out and seeks to intervene in those sexual peculiarities over which it keeps watch:

The pleasure that comes of exercising a power that questions, watches, spies,searches out, palpates, brings to light; and on the other hand, the pleasure that kindles at having to evade this power, flee from it, fool it, or travesty it. The power that lets itself be invaded by the pleasure it is pursuing; and opposite it, power asserting itself in the pleasure of showing off, scandalizing, or resisting.\textsuperscript{108}

This confessional mechanism for the transformation of sex into discourse works both for and against power. As I noted in Chapter 1, the knowledge produced by confessional practices and the rendering visible of marginal sexual communities thereby, for Foucault, initiates a tighter incorporation into the operations of power. Individuals are attached to the mechanisms of power through attaching themselves to sexual identities. But the evidence of contemporary sexual politics, as I have shown throughout this thesis, has affirmed Foucault's contention that sexual identities forged in resistance to those mechanisms of power, albeit from within those mechanisms, are nevertheless capable of innovation. This 'exceeding' of the apparatus of sexuality constitutes the motor of a continuing transformation of those categories, which works as a tactical evasion of power by which the power relation itself is kept in play.

S/m discourses initiate their own regulatory discursive regime with power effects on their subjects. Recalling Minson's argument (outlined in Chapter 2) that 'coming out' as 'gay' constitutes a modern day confessional technology, 'coming out' as a sadomasochist too works to avow one's sexuality in a way determined by the discourses of s/m and enforced by its disciplinary regime. Examples of this disciplinary activity, noted earlier in this chapter, include abiding by the conditions of consent to s/m (e.g. stopping the scene on command of the previously agreed

\textsuperscript{105} Foucault, \textit{The History of Sexuality}, p.45.
\textsuperscript{106} ibid., p.45.
'safe word') and only engaging in 'safe sex' practices. Not to do so attracts the penalty of ostracism from the s/m community. In this way, like consciousness-raising, s/m practice effects the insertion of the subject into a new regime of power in which they are just as regulated as the subjects of lesbian feminism.

While I take s/m discourse to represent a new discursive regime with disciplinary effects on its subjects, several of s/m's discursive innovations present a significant challenge to the dominant discourses of sexuality (whether lesbian feminist or in society at large). These innovations include s/m's undermining of the principle of identity (A=A); its strategy of 'counter-productivity' in promoting a proliferation of sexualities, pleasures and sites of resistance; and the corollary of this strategy: a confounding of any easy normative alignment of genital configurations, desire, sexual practice, gender identity and sexual identity.

Power, difference and 'agonistic' democracy

The principle of identity (A=A), as I have shown, worked in radical and lesbian feminism to figure difference (equated with sexual difference or difference in power) as a signifier of relations of domination. On this conception, to be free and equal implies relations of sameness. For radical and lesbian feminists, therefore, all differences, including power differentials on whatever grounds, had to be overcome. A future world without domination and strife was a world where structural relations of power did not exist, where power was absent or shared equitably. It was to be a world without difference.

To radical and lesbian feminists, the heresy of lesbian s/m lies precisely in its turning the principle of identity on its head. Lesbian sadomasochists insist that power differences and freedom are not in contradiction and can exist simultaneously. Through constructing s/m as the consensual exchange of power between free and equal agents, s/m lesbians are able to exercise their desire for power and experience the pleasures of power. Whereas for radical lesbian feminists "true sexual freedom will be possible only when we break the connection between sex
and power, when there is no power component in sexual interactions", for s/m practitioners sexuality is "both power and a pathway to power." S/m, its proponents believe, can help lesbians overcome their fear of power (even as they desire it) through its exercise, thus subverting crippling trainings to passive femininity. It is also claimed that the complexities of power can be explored through role reversal. In this sense, s/m can be seen as a 'school for agency' where the s/m relation becomes the exemplary model for the ethical exercise of power within relations of difference.\(^{109}\)

The possibility of recasting s/m relations of power as not necessarily signifying relations of domination is reflected in Foucault's thinking on power. Foucault drew a distinction between relations of power, which are always changeable, reversible and unstable, and relations of domination, where the power relation is fixed in perpetual asymmetry, as in the case of slavery. Power relations, as modifiable relations, are necessarily relations between 'free' subjects, by which Foucault meant subjects who are positioned within a field of possible actions.\(^{110}\) In contrast with the liberal democratic subject's purported original state of freedom and equality, for Foucault power inheres in all social relations. There is no 'outside' of or 'end' to power but only ongoing power struggles. For Foucault, then, human relations are fundamentally contestatory or 'agonistic':

a relationship which is at the same time reciprocal incitation and struggle; less of a face-to-face confrontation which paralyzes both sides than a permanent provocation.\(^{111}\)

In freeing power relations from relations of domination, Foucault presents the possibility that power can be effectively contested and

\(^{107}\) Wagner, op.cit., p.30.

\(^{108}\) Lucy, op.cit., p.38. The double entendre 'coming to power' is a dominant theme throughout writings by proponents of s/m.


renegotiated. The problem then becomes one of the democratic negotiation of difference and power. In the context of this problematic, the s/m relationship is cited by some as an exemplary model of democratic agonistic practice. It is in this sense that s/m is understood by its practitioners and some commentators to constitute an 'aesthetics' of power.\(^{112}\) The debate over s/m, then, opened a way to rethink difference apart from the principle of identity. As I show in the following two chapters, the negotiation of power and difference \textit{qua} difference becomes an increasing concern to gay and lesbian ethicists in the aftermath of the 'sex wars'.

Bodies and pleasures

Foucault's interest in s/m followed from his contention that: "The rallying point for the counterattack against the deployment of sexuality ought not to be sex-desire, but bodies and pleasures".\(^{113}\) Sex, rather than being the object of liberation from repression is, instead, to Foucault, a complex idea that was formed within the deployment of sexuality. Foucault's view was that sex (more sex, better sex) can not be mobilized to fight the deployment of sexuality for it is implicated in it. He therefore could not support projects which promoted the liberation of (repressed) libido. Rather, Foucault promoted a 'desealogizing' strategy. 'Desealogizing' involves two moves: refusing to demand the specificity of one's sexuality (by which individuals are attached to 'sexuality' and to mechanisms of power) and the rights pertaining to it (its free expression or its liberation), and creating new pleasures of the body which were not centred on sexual (genital) experience.\(^{114}\)

S/m, for Foucault, exemplified desealogization:

I don't think this [s/m movement] has anything to do with the disclosure or the uncovering of S/M tendencies deep within our

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\(^{112}\) Young \textit{et al.}, op.cit., p.104; Halperin, op.cit., pp.85-86.

\(^{113}\) Foucault, \textit{The History of Sexuality}, p.157.

\(^{114}\) Foucault, 'The Confession of the Flesh', pp.219-220; M Foucault, 'The History of Sexuality', in Gordon (ed.), op.cit., p.191. Indeed, in 'Sex, Power and the Politics of Identity' (pp.30,58), Foucault can be read as critiquing a sex radical position that promotes lesbianism as simply sex. Citing Faderman's work, Foucault bemoans the loss of affectional relationships and friendships between men (which may or may not have involved sex) through the sexualization of all relationships in the nineteenth century (pp.30,58).
unconscious, and so on. I think that S/M is much more than that; it's the real creation of new possibilities of pleasure, which people had no idea about previously.\textsuperscript{115}

The "invention of new possibilities of pleasure with strange parts of [the] body"\textsuperscript{116} through s/m practice is most graphically documented in Califia's writings. Fistfucking, an innovation of gay male s/m practitioners, is invoked as the quintessential form of degenitalized pleasure.\textsuperscript{117} Piercing, and rubber and other garment fetishes, work to eroticize new zones of the body through "distribut[ing] feeling over the entire skin".\textsuperscript{118} But it is the disturbance and proliferation of sexual and gender identities, generated through Califia's sexual practices in the context of s/m, that are most suggestive of s/m's capacity to (temporarily, in an ongoing 'game' of power) confound and surpass the apparatus of sexuality.

Califia describes 'transforming' into a man in the process of preparing for a pre-arranged sexual encounter with a woman. In the ritual of putting on male clothes, 'packing' a dildo (wearing a dildo under the clothes so that, in appearance and touch, male genitals are signified) and putting condoms in her pocket, Califia assumes a masculine subject position. In the sexual scene that follows, she reports experiencing the specific sexual pleasures of being a male: the power obtaining in having one's penis admired and desired, having an erection, penetrating and giving pleasure to a woman. This does not mean she wants to be a man or possess a penis. Indeed, in the next sexual encounter, she might very well be the female partner. On another occasion, she and her female sexual partner might both be men (and, just to complicate matters, one might be 'straight'), while another time they both might be lesbians engaging in 'vanilla' sex.\textsuperscript{119}

\textsuperscript{115} Foucault, 'Sex, Power and the Politics of Identity', p.27. See also Foucault, 'Sexual Choice, Sexual Act: Foucault and Homosexuality', in Kritzman (ed.), op.cit., pp.296-299 for a discussion of s/m.

\textsuperscript{116} Foucault, 'Sex, Power and the Politics of Identity', p.27.

\textsuperscript{117} Califia, Public Sex, pp.183-184; Halperin, op.cit., pp.86,90-92. Fist-fucking is only "degenitalized" in the case of men. For women, fist-fucking is practiced anally and vaginally.

\textsuperscript{118} Califia, Public Sex, p.172. See also p.235.

\textsuperscript{119} Ibid., pp.175-177,183. This does not necessarily mean that power \textit{per se} is coded 'male' in such exchanges, but rather that there is a different power operating in the 'male' and 'female' positions. For Califia, the effect of these experiences has been to 'de-mystify' the penis: its power over her has been reduced.
Califia also reports having sex with gay men. In these encounters, the men identify as gay and she identifies as lesbian and the encounter itself is coded as 'gay sex'. She refuses the assignation 'bisexual' because she is not turned on to male partners because they are men but to the sexual practice they engage in. Their sexual liaison is about the pleasure they can give to each other: it is not a matter of homosexual or heterosexual desire. However, Califia would not have sex with a man outside the gay community context for it would be imbued with very different meanings and involve different (limited) practices. For the man, it would more likely be seen as an opportunity to convert a lesbian to heterosexuality. Sex with men in the gay community offers, to Califia, a greater range of experiences and possibilities of pleasure because of the community's more open attitude to sex and to sexual experimentation.\(^{120}\)

For Califia, this new 'gender fuck' (crossing the gender line), is about breaking down the normative heterosexual eroticism that is only meant to be sustained between two ostensibly stable genders. The practices she has described demonstrate, for her, how controlling and limiting 'normal' gender roles and sexual practices are. She instead is concerned to explore the erotic pleasures possible through the destabilization of gender and sexual identities. In this context of sexual experimentation enabled by s/m, Califia reports that butch/femme lesbian roleplaying has also been transformed. No longer are the roles and power relations so rigid: there are now 'butch bottoms' and 'femme tops' in s/m encounters.\(^{121}\)

As the example of 'gay' sex between a gay man and a lesbian woman shows, the category of 'homosexuality' itself is being destabilized through s/m practice. The sorts of sexual practices Califia engages in demonstrates the historical contingency of sexual categories and identities: "There was no such thing as a Castro clone, a lesbian-feminist, or a Kinsey Six a century ago, and one hundred years from now these types will be as extinct as Urnings".\(^{122}\) This is not meant as a call for a return to the polymorphous perversity of early gay liberation and feminism, but rather reflects the new understanding of the constructed

\(^{120}\) ibid., pp.183,185.

\(^{121}\) ibid., pp.178,181.

\(^{122}\) ibid., p.187.
nature of sexual identities enabled by Foucault's work and that of historians like Jeffrey Weeks.

Califia's sexual experiments also manifestly demonstrate the radical mobility and fluidity of sexual desire and identity. S/m practice seems to enable the creation of new pleasures which produce confounding reconfigurations of genitals, desires, sexual practices and sexual and gender identities. It is by doing this, rather than by purportedly representing the 'truth' of the self, that s/m is 'political' in Foucault's sense. S/m in its sexually 'experimental' mode is political because it represents pleasure for pleasure's sake and because of the resistive identities that are generated thereby.\(^{123}\) If coming out as lesbian, gay or a sadomasochist represents subjection to a totalizing identity, then Califia, in her 'gender fuck' mode, represents a de-totalizing move where any stable or totalizing identity is refused.

While Foucault concedes that the proliferation of discourses and pleasures generated by s/m can be implicated in a new extension of the deployment of sexuality, where they function as modes of social control, he believes that, through promoting the body and its pleasures, one can stay one step ahead of power.\(^{124}\) But, as I show in the next section, Foucault's project can be problematized on the basis of a residual 'naturalism' to bodies and pleasures.

**Foucault's repressive hypothesis?**

A repressive hypothesis of sexuality (libido) in s/m discourses, as I have noted, often sits uncomfortably side-by-side with an explicit commitment to a Foucauldian understanding of sexuality. But 'negative' and 'positive' conceptions of power are also a confusing and sometimes confounding presence in Foucault's own writings on sexuality. Attempting to get a grip on this problematic in Foucault's work, Russell Keat\(^{125}\) has made a useful distinction between 'real' and 'conceptual' constructions of sexuality.

\(^{123}\) Halperin, op.cit., p.97.

\(^{124}\) Foucault, 'Sex, Power and the Politics of Identity', p.28. See also The History of Sexuality, pp.47-48,107 for a discussion of how power extends itself through the proliferation of sexual practices.

'Conceptual' constructions of sexuality refer to interpretations of and meanings given to the body and sexual behaviours, as well as to the social construction of attitudes towards and beliefs about sex. The conceptual construction approach is most clearly seen in projects which describe the historical production of categories of sexual behaviours and 'types', and their classification in relation to sexual norms. This approach is exemplified by the work of historians and anthropologists of sexuality like Jeffrey Weeks and Gayle Rubin, and in much of Foucault's *The History of Sexuality*.

The 'real' construction of sexuality, on the other hand, refers to the actual production of sexualized bodies, as in Foucault's statement that:

> the purpose of the present study is in fact to show how the deployments of power are directly connected to the body - to bodies, functions, physiological processes, sensations, and pleasures . . . I do not envisage a 'history of mentalities' that would take account of bodies only through the manner in which they have been perceived and given meaning and value; but a 'history of bodies' and the manner in which what is most material and most vital in them has been invested.\(^{126}\)

The two modes of 'construction' identified in Foucault's work, the 'conceptual' and 'real', are not mutually exclusive. Rather, for Keat, the crucial mediation between these two modes is performed by the discursive practices of sexuality. Foucault did not elaborate the mechanisms of the discursive production of sexualized bodies as he did in the case of disciplined bodies in *Discipline and Punish*: he intended this to be the subject matter of subsequent volumes of *The History of Sexuality*. But because of the quite different direction his work instead took in the later volumes, Foucault's failure to elaborate the mechanisms through which sexed bodies are produced has left a lacuna in his work which possibly accounts for the elision of the 'real' construction of sexualized bodies from most accounts which draw on Foucault, with some notable exceptions.\(^{127}\)

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\(^{126}\) Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, pp.151-152.

\(^{127}\) Judith Butler's work, for instance, is exemplary in attempting to work with Foucault's most difficult proposition: the discursive production of bodies, in Butler's reworking, gendered bodies. See *Gender Trouble and Bodies That Matter*. 
What I am suggesting, following Keat, is that the deployment of a 'conceptual' construction of sexuality rests on a repressive hypothesis when it presumes a natural sexuality (libido) that exists prior to and independent of its discursive production by power, when it presumes 'a sexuality' which is subsequently subject to interpretation and is thereby given meaning. Power in this 'conceptual' constructionist approach is understood to be in a relation of exteriority to sexuality, from where it acts 'negatively' to impose a limit or meaning on a pre-existing sexuality.

The History of Sexuality's repressive hypothesis, according to Keat, consists of Foucault's investment in bodies and pleasures as the site of a counterattack against the deployment of sexuality. Foucault's 'bodies and pleasures' represent a site of a residual nature and pre-discursive experience, as evidenced in statements like: "The growth of perversions . . . is the real product of the encroachment of a type of power on bodies and pleasures".\(^{128}\) Like Keat, I believe Foucault's distinction between 'conceptual' and 'real' construction of sexuality is not clear cut even in his own work. The conditions for misunderstandings/misreadings of Foucault's work are therefore already there, such that he can be easily appropriated to a sexual liberationist agenda.

In this chapter, I have taken the historical emergence of discourses of lesbian s/m in the late 1970s and early 1980s to be a 'productive resistance' to the normalizing operations of lesbian feminism. Rubin's and Califia's self-conscious replication of the discursive and political strategies of earlier gay liberation, however, often worked to reproduce liberationist problematics within lesbian s/m discourses. These problematics, most marked in Califia's work, include a repressive hypothesis of sexuality, in which power's relation to sex is understood to be oppositional and negative, and a concomitant political project of sexual liberation led by the sex radical vanguard. As a new 'regime of truth' on sexuality arrived at through its own constitutive exclusionary

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\(^{128}\) Foucault, The History of Sexuality, p.48. Other commentators have also noted the tendency to the naturalism of 'bodies and pleasures'. See, for instance, Simons, op.cit., p.84; Butler, Gender Trouble, p.97; E. Grosz, Volatile Bodies. Toward a Corporeal Feminism, St. Leonards N.S.W., Allen and Unwin, 1994, pp.155-156; E. Grosz, 'Experimental Desire. Rethinking Queer Subjectivity', in J. Copjec (ed.), Supposing the Subject, London and New York, Verso, 1994, pp.144-145; D. Riley, Am I That Name? Feminism and the Category of 'Women' in History, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1996, pp.104-105; R. Diprose, The Bodies of Women. Ethics, Embodiment and Sexual Difference, London and New York, Routledge, 1994, pp.75,79. Diprose also observes (p.83) that pleasure and pain are already interpretations.
operations, s/m discourses inserted their subjects into a new totalizing identity and its attendant set of limitations and disciplinary operations.

Yet, Foucault's formative influence on Rubin's thinking produced innovations that challenged lesbian feminism's principle of identity. Refusing the lesbian feminist maxim that relations of difference necessarily signify relations of domination, sex radical discourse opened up the possibility that power relations need not be overcome once and for all (the revolutionary telos) but can be contested and re-negotiated. Rubin's disarticulation of gender and sexuality disrupted radical and lesbian feminism's colonizing reduction of sexuality to gender relations and constituted 'sexuality' as an autonomous analytic domain. Califia's confounding reconfigurations of genital arrangements, desire, sexual practice, sexual and gender identity destabilized her own tendency to reify s/m identity. These innovations and internal instabilities produced by Foucauldian-inspired interventions in sexual politics of the early 1980s provided some of the critical discursive conditions for the emergence of 'Queer' in the 1990s, as I show in Chapter 7.

In the next chapter, however, I consider lesbian feminism's 'ethical turn' in the aftermath of the sex wars. This proceeds through a discussion of Foucault's final works on ethics. In one of his last interviews, Foucault seems to have reconsidered his mode of resisting the normalizing apparatus of sexuality, asserting that "Sex is not a fatality; it's a possibility for creative life". Turning away from the future course set in Volume 1 of *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault became more interested in how contemporary individuals could constitute themselves as ethical subjects of sexuality. Foucault's thinking on ethics and his promotion of a contemporary 'aesthetics of existence' can usefully be turned to an analysis of 'lesbian ethics'.

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129 Foucault, 'Sex, Power and the Politics of Identity', p.27.
CHAPTER 6

LESBIAN FEMINISM'S ETHICAL TURN

The previous chapter demonstrated some of the effects of the dividing practices operative in the constitution of 'true' lesbian feminist identity: the production of lesbian feminism's 'others' (categories of 'unauthentic' women and lesbians formed from its exclusions) and lesbian sadomasochists' subsequent resistance to and contestation of that 'othering'. But the debate over lesbian sadomasochism was also a moral-ethical debate: it was centrally concerned with how lesbians should live their lives and act in the world, particularly in their relations with other women. It is to this ethical dimension of feminism that I now turn.

In this chapter, I draw on Foucault's distinction between a normalizing moral code and an 'aesthetics of existence' to highlight some differences between pre- and post- sex wars radical and lesbian feminism. I argue that early radical and lesbian feminism promoted a set of prescriptive, universal feminist values and rules for action: a normalizing moral code in Foucault's sense of the term. Defining this ethos (manner of living and being) and demonstrating its normalizing and disciplining effects requires briefly revisiting early radical and lesbian feminist texts.

I then go on to argue that Sarah Lucia Hoagland's elaboration of a lesbian ethics in the aftermath of the sex wars, and self-consciously against the disciplinary effects of earlier radical and lesbian feminism's moral code, can be usefully understood as an attempt to constitute a Foucauldian 'aesthetics of existence': a voluntary practice of self where one constitutes one's own ethos without reference to a formal and disciplinary moral code. However, because it is essentially a reformulation of lesbian feminism, Hoagland's ethics is shown to reinscribe the modern forms of normative subjectivity that a Foucauldian aesthetics of existence is meant to subvert. Lesbian ethics, then, in practice reproduces the problematics it sought to overcome, particularly that of difference.
But neither is Foucauldian ethics immune from interrogation on this basis. I draw on feminist critiques of Foucault's ethics to show that his aesthetics of existence, based on masculinist models of ancient Greek ethics and Enlightenment conceptions of subjectivity, is problematic for a feminist ethical project. Identifying the ongoing modernist problematics residing within both lesbian and Foucauldian ethics is a prelude to my discussion of contemporary developments in Queer ethics in the final chapter.

I. **FOUCAULT'S ETHICS**

In his final works, Foucault turned to the problem of the subject or, rather, "the way a human being turns him- or herself into a subject". For Foucault, the power relations promoted by modern forms of governmentality, specifically rationalization, could be elucidated through an analysis of its forms of resistance. Foucault saw in contemporary political struggles - those of feminism, movements against psychiatry and medicine, prisoners' activism, the assertion of children's rights and the gay movement - a common resistance to the "government of individualization". All these struggles are in part, to Foucault, attacks on the 'submission of subjectivity', the form of power identified in Chapter 1 as being at work in the constitution of the modern homosexual subject. It is a form of power which "categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize and which others have to recognize in him". As movements against this form of power, the women's and gay movements, to Foucault, must necessarily call on individuals to 'refuse' what they are rather than attempt to 'discover' who they 'truly' are:

the political, ethical, social, philosophical problem of our days
is not to try to liberate the individual from the state, and from the state's institutions, but to liberate us both from the state and from the type of individualization which is linked to the state.

We have to promote new forms of subjectivity through the

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1 Foucault, *The Subject and Power*, p.208.
2 Ibid., p.212.
3 Ibid., p.212.
refusal of this kind of individuality which has been imposed on us for several centuries.\textsuperscript{4}

For Foucault, this struggle against both the state and forms of subjectivity promoted by the state introduces its own set of problematics. In the case of sexual conduct, Foucault notes the decline in the idea of morality as obedience to a code of rules, along with the disappearance of much of the previous legal intervention in individuals' personal, private lives. The vacuum created by the erosion of old modes of moral legitimization has left individuals to make up their own minds on moral conduct and to choose their own modes of existence. To Foucault, this new problematic of 'freedom' in contemporary liberal democracies is one of how, and on what basis, individuals are to give form and meaning to their pleasurable relations with others.\textsuperscript{5}

The problem of freedom inheres in sexual liberation's repressive hypothesis. Here, the problem of how to act in the world is presumed to be solved upon the liberation of a sovereign subject who is understood to be already equipped with moral sensibility. The 'liberation of desires' and the lifting of sexual taboos has, however, not delivered its promise of perfect freedom, satisfying relations and a blueprint for living. Rather, for Foucault, the 'liberated' condition of contemporary sexual subjects has instead opened up new relationships of power which require regulation through 'practices of freedom'. Foucault contrasts what he sees as the necessary work of developing a new sexual ethic with liberation movements' attempts so far:

Recent liberation movements suffer from the fact that they cannot find any principle on which to base the elaboration of a new ethics. They need an ethics, but they cannot find any other ethics than an ethics founded on so-called scientific knowledge of what the self is, what desire is, what the unconscious is, and so on.\textsuperscript{6}

\textsuperscript{4} Ibid., p.216.


\textsuperscript{6} Foucault, 'On the Genealogy of Ethics', p.343.
For Foucault, then, the struggle against the 'submission of subjectivity' and against traditional, authoritarian modes of morality must lead to a reformulation of contemporary sexual politics. First, "from the idea that the self is not given to us, I think there is only one practical consequence: we have to create ourselves as a work of art".\textsuperscript{7} Second:

It seems to me that to use this ethical problem of the definition of practices of freedom is more important than the affirmation (and repetitious, at that) that sexuality or desire must be set free.\textsuperscript{8}

For Foucault, the problem facing contemporary individuals is how to conduct themselves as ethical subjects of sexuality within the new relations of power that liberation has opened up. How individuals are to engage in these 'games of power' with a minimum of domination in the absence of morality for Foucault necessitates a search for an 'aesthetics of existence'.\textsuperscript{9}

\section*{Greek ethics}

Foucault's thinking on the possible form of a contemporary ethical practice based on creative self-production arose in the course of his historical investigations for \textit{The Use Of Pleasure} and \textit{The Care of the Self}, volumes two and three of \textit{The History of Sexuality}. In those studies, he was concerned with the questions of how it was that modern individuals came to experience themselves as subjects of 'desire' and 'sexuality', and how sexual conduct came to be problematized to the extent that it became an object of moral solicitude and ethical conduct.\textsuperscript{10} In his comparative study of pagan and Christian cultures, Foucault found in ancient Greek culture a model of ethical conduct, elements of which he believed might be usefully drawn on to construct a contemporary sexual ethic.

\textsuperscript{7} Ibid., p.351.
\textsuperscript{8} Foucault, 'The Ethic of Care for the Self as a Practice of Freedom', p.3.
\textsuperscript{9} Ibid., pp.3-4,18; Foucault, 'An Aesthetics of Existence', p.49.
In contrasting a Greek 'aesthetics of existence' to Christian moral codes, Foucault delineates two elements he believes are present in all systems of morality: a code of behaviour and forms of 'subjectivation' (submission) to that code. On Foucault's definition, a moral code is a set of values and rules of action that are recommended to individuals through the intermediary of various prescriptive agencies such as the family (in one of its roles), educational institutions, churches, and so forth.\footnote{Foucault, The Use of Pleasure, p.25.}

Moral codes can be accompanied by mechanisms that enforce them, such as where their legal codification provides for punishment for infraction and non-compliance.\footnote{Foucault, 'An Aesthetics of Existence', p.49; Foucault, The Use of Pleasure, pp.29-30. Note in 'The Return of Morality' p.252 the term 'subjectivation' is used to refer to the procedure by which one obtains the constitution of a subject or of a subjectivity.}

This quasi-juridical form of enforcing compliance to a moral code is only one possible form of subjectivation to that code. Conformation to a moral code not only involves a relation to the rules but also a relation to the self. All moralities therefore, to Foucault, promote models for establishing a relationship to the self through which individuals constitute themselves as subjects of moral conduct. These 'practices of self' are meant to ensure moral subjectivation, as in the Christian practices of self-decipherment and public examination (the confession).\footnote{Foucault, The Use of Pleasure, p.30; Foucault, 'An Aesthetics of Existence', p.49.}

The difference between pagan and Christian moralities, for Foucault, lies in which of the two elements - the code or its forms of subjectivation - is emphasised. In Christianity the rules of the code are emphasised while in the more ethically-oriented moralities of ancient Greece (where there was little legal codification of sexual conduct), the emphasis was on forms of subjectivation. In Greece, exact observance of the code and rules of behaviour was less important than the relation to the self through which one voluntarily constituted oneself as an ethical subject of the code. Christian and pagan cultures can therefore be distinguished by their subjects' relations to the moral code. For Christians, adherence is universal and compulsory (with a view to normalizing the whole
population). In Greece, compliance was voluntary: an 'aesthetics of existence' was a personal choice which was the prerogative of a small elite.¹⁴

Ancient Greece, with its minimal legal codification of sexual conduct, its problematization of sexual conduct not through prohibition but through the 'problem of freedom', its regulation of sexual conduct not so much by laws but through self-regulation, and its paradox of a freedom contingent on such self-restraint, provided for Foucault a striking parallel to contemporary circumstances.¹⁵ This did not mean that Foucault advocated adopting the Greek model for a contemporary ethics. As he put it: "you can't find the solution of a problem in the solution of another problem raised at another moment by other people".¹⁶ Indeed, he abhorred Greek ethics' links to a virile society, to dissymmetry, exclusion of the other, non-reciprocity of pleasure and obsession with penetration.¹⁷ Rather, what Foucault believed could be salvaged from the Greek experience of sexual morality was a model of a practice of liberty, an ethic of autonomous self-regulation without reference to a set of codified rules and a technique for how to live. He believed these principles could be turned to the development of a contemporary mode of self-management that could enable power relations to be conducted with a minimum of domination.¹⁸

Importantly for Foucault, for the purposes of developing a contemporary aesthetics of existence, sexuality in Greece was a moral experience without a theory of the subject. The lack of a notion of an essential subject enabled wide diversity and great latitude in the Greeks' search for and development of styles of existence. It is this same opportunity which Foucault believed presents itself to contemporary individuals. The contemporary search for an aesthetics of existence is, therefore, not a search for a true self which draws on psychological techniques of self-decipherment but is rather the creation of the self as a


¹⁶ Foucault, 'On the Genealogy of Ethics', p.343.

¹⁷ Ibid., p.346.

work of art from the styles and inventions found in the cultural environment.\textsuperscript{19}

\textbf{Enlightenment ethico-politics}

The starting point of this discussion was Foucault's call for the refusal of modern forms of subjectivity linked to the state and to normalizing regimes. Such a refusal, to Foucault, must correspond to the invention of new practices of self and new modes of subjectivity. This is a project which must by necessity proceed, as Foucault argues it did for the Greeks, without reference to political, social and economic structures. In refusing any analytical or necessary link between ethics and political, social and economic structures, Foucault here seems to advocate a radical retreat from politics to a purely private creation of self as a work of art.\textsuperscript{20} This interpretation, however, is undercut by the re-presentation of the project in 'What is Enlightenment?', an essay contemporaneous with his work on Greek ethics.

In 'What is Enlightenment', Foucault relocates elements of Greek ethics - taking oneself as the object of a complex and difficult elaboration of autonomous subjectivity, a freedom of conscience without subjection to authority, voluntary choice in modes of existence - in the more recent tradition of the Enlightenment. Indeed, his concern to distinguish between humanist and Enlightenment conceptions of subjectivity, noted in Chapter 4, was to recuperate the Enlightenment principle of "a critique and a permanent creation of ourselves in our autonomy"\textsuperscript{21} without summoning up the 'human essence' of humanist discourse.\textsuperscript{22}

Refigured as the 'philosophical ethos of modernity', these elements then take on a political dimension. For Foucault, the 'attitude' of modernity contains a political ethos of a permanent critique of our historical era. This ethos must involve a 'limit attitude': a practical critique


\textsuperscript{20} Foucault, 'On the Genealogy of Ethics', p.350.

\textsuperscript{21} Foucault, 'What is Enlightenment?', p.44.

\textsuperscript{22} ibid., pp.36,39,41-42,44.
that takes the form of possible transgression of the limits imposed on modern subjects. Unlike the Enlightenment’s understanding of critique as ultimately revealing universal truths, Foucault’s ethico-political project is concerned with asking how we came to be what we are. It is to interrogate what seems to be the natural and inevitable in one’s own identity to reveal its contingency, and thence its possible overcoming. This involves a historical-critical enquiry, not a hermeneutics of the self.\textsuperscript{23}

The goal of such a project is not to reach some space of pure freedom ‘outside’ power (or even ‘outside’ modernity itself) or to effect global revolution. Rather, it is ethico-political work done at the limits of the self, where the possibility of transgression exists. On a broader scale, Foucault’s is an ethico-political practice of situating/locating oneself in present conditions and structures in order to “grasp the points where change is possible and desirable, and to determine the precise form this change should take.”\textsuperscript{24} It is through this political practice that partial, specific transformations may be effected.

Foucault anticipated and partially conceded the ‘global/radical’ (specifically Marxist) objection to such a strategy: that such partial transformations are limited and determined by larger social-political structures. But rather than seeing in that possible eventuality merely a delivery to co-option, assimilation and therefore failure (as Marxists and radicals would), Foucault rather saw it as delivery to a new (and different) starting point of resistance. The programmatic prescriptions and regimes of the ‘global/radical’ project, to Foucault, have only led to a return of the most ‘dangerous’ political traditions.\textsuperscript{25} Of his own ethic of permanent resistance, Foucault remarked:

My point is not that everything is bad, but that everything is dangerous, which is not exactly the same as bad. If everything is dangerous, then we always have something to do. So my position leads not to apathy but to a hyper- and pessimistic activism.\textsuperscript{26}

\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., pp.42,45,50.
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., p.46.
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., pp.46-47.
\textsuperscript{26} Foucault, ‘On the Genealogy of Ethics’, p.343.
The main danger of articulating a contemporary ethico-political project within Enlightenment terms, as Foucault saw it, lay in the historical link between the modern individual's acquisition of capabilities and the concurrent growth in state power through procedures of discipline and normalization. The critical question for Foucault, then, is how the growth of individuals' capacities and their struggle for freedom (which he characterizes as growth in autonomy) may proceed without the intensification of power relations.\(^{27}\)

**Becoming gay/becoming lesbian**

Foucault's most elaborated ethico-political project centred on the notion of 'becoming gay'. Wary of the tendency to relate the question of homosexuality to the problem of "Who am I?" and "What is the secret of my desire?", Foucault instead proposed that:

Perhaps it would be better to ask oneself, "What relations, through homosexuality, can be established, invented, multiplied and modulated?" The problem is not to discover in oneself the truth of sex but rather to use sexuality henceforth to arrive at a multiplicity of relationships. And no doubt that's the real reason why homosexuality is not a form of desire but something desirable. Therefore we have to work at becoming homosexuals and not be obstinate in recognizing that we are. The development towards which the problem of homosexuality tends is the one of friendship.\(^{28}\)

The political consequence of such a project, for Foucault, is the destabilization of normalizing regimes effected through the gay and lesbian community's creation of new forms of life, relationships, friendships, art and culture. How Foucault's concept of 'becoming gay' has been taken up in 'queer theory' is a subject of discussion in Chapter 7.

\(^{27}\) Foucault, 'What is Enlightenment?', pp.47-48. However, for Foucault, there is no other alternative but to start from where we are: located in the historical era of modernity, and as subjects of modernity (p.43).

\(^{28}\) M. Foucault, 'Friendship as a Way of Life', in S. Lotringer (ed.), *Foucault Live*, New York, Semiotext(e), 1989, pp.203-204. See also Foucault, 'Sex, Power and the Politics of Identity', p.27 for a similar discussion.
How might Foucault's distinction between a normalizing moral code and an aesthetics of existence be applied to an analysis of the difference between pre- and post- 'sex wars' radical and lesbian feminism? Here I call on a variety of unrelated sources to help draw these connections. First, Rosalyn Diprose's\textsuperscript{29} elaboration of the links between modern disciplinary regimes of governance and the constitution of an embodied ethos (manner of being) co-extensive with those disciplinary regimes, works to refigure those regimes as disciplinary moral codes. Diprose's discussion here is suggestive for an analysis of radical and lesbian feminism. If radical and lesbian feminism are implicated in modern forms of normalizing power through their humanist and Enlightenment antecedents, they might well operate as disciplinary moral codes. This perspective on radical and lesbian feminism opens up a space both for an analysis of their moral codes and an investigation of the disciplinary practices through which the code constitutes the embodied ethos of their subjects.

Second, lesbian ethicists themselves have characterized the 'ethical problem' of feminism in terms similar to Foucault. The 'problem of freedom' is very much in evidence in Marilyn Frye's discussion of the moral dilemmas of feminism, for example. She observes that feminists' rejection and abandonment of patriarchal culture and values has created a moral void and a concomitant 'hunger' for ethics.\textsuperscript{30} Frye's response to this problem of freedom, articulated some years before the outbreak of the 'sex wars', was as follows: "For feminists, the permanent moral problem of how to live becomes a problem of how to live in accord with feminist values".\textsuperscript{31}

Third, post-'sex wars' lesbian ethics self-consciously constituted itself against what it claimed to be the oppressive moral code of earlier lesbian feminism, to which it often explicitly refers as a regime of 'political correctness'.\textsuperscript{32} Lesbian ethics, in positing a voluntary ethical project in which lesbianism is figured as a mode of being to be invented in a non-

\textsuperscript{29} Diprose, op.cit., pp.21-24.


\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., p.28. Essay written in 1976.

\textsuperscript{32} S. L. Hoagland, \textit{Lesbian Ethics. Toward New Value}, Palo Alto CA, Institute of Lesbian Studies, 1988, pp.181-181. Hoagland does not mean by this criticism that she disagrees with 'political correctness' \textit{per se}, however. It was rather its application (imposed rather than chosen) that bothered her.
oppressive relation to others, and proposing to create new kinds of relationships through lesbian sexuality, finds an echo in Foucault's notion of 'becoming gay'. Indeed, in Mark Blasius' elaboration of 'becoming gay', Hoagland's project is cited as representing such an ethics.33

Finally, Foucault's cryptic remark that, because of its creative possibilities, homosexuality might be something to be desired rather than a form of desire, is very suggestive for understanding the phenomenon of 'political lesbianism'. An often ignored and undertheorized feature of lesbian feminism was the 'mass conversion' of feminists to lesbianism in the early 1970s. For many of those women, this 'conversion' did not so much represent the discovery of their 'true', but previously repressed, lesbian desire as it did the taking up of a new subject position that offered the possibility a creating a new self and a new mode of being female beyond the confining norms of wife and mother. Political lesbianism can therefore be understood through a Foucauldian ethical schema to be a process of 'becoming lesbian'.

There is a further aspect to Foucault's ethics that needs to be outlined before I proceed to an analysis of pre- and post- 'sex war' lesbian feminism. Besides a moral code, ethical or moral systems promote 'modes of subjectivation', or means through which one forms oneself as an ethical subject. In The Use of Pleasure, Foucault delineates four elements constituting the modes of subjectivation operative in all moralities whether they be pagan, Christian or more contemporary practices of freedom.

The first element of subjectivation is the determination of the 'ethical substance': what aspect of the self is to be problematized and constituted as the object of moral practice. The ethical substance is the part of the self which is to be worked over and transformed so that one might constitute oneself as an ethical subject. The second element of subjectivation is the 'mode of subjection' or the means through which individuals come to recognize themselves as the subject of that moral rule such that they feel obliged to put it into practice. Subjection to the

moral rule involves a third element of subjectivation: 'self-forming activity'. Each morality promotes particular 'practices of self': 'technologies' and techniques through which the transformative work on the ethical substance is performed. The final element of subjectivation is the 'telos' or the moral goal of the exercise. The telos of ethical practice and proper conduct is the achievement of the mode of being desirable in that morality. In summary, subjectivation is an 'ascetical' practice which is "an exercise of self upon self by which one tries to work out, to transform one's self and to attain a certain mode of being". My discussion of earlier and later lesbian feminist moralities is loosely organized around these categories as they apply to the domain of lesbian feminist moral concern: relations between women.

II. RADICAL AND LESBIAN FEMINISM AS DISCIPLINARY MORAL CODES

My argument throughout this thesis is that radical and lesbian feminism can be understood as normalizing regimes legitimized by their truth claims. As I have shown, radical and lesbian feminism at various times have asserted different and sometimes conflicting claims about the 'true' condition of women under patriarchal rule, the 'true' form of women's liberated subjectivity and prescriptions for women's liberation. One element of radical and lesbian feminism has remained constant throughout all their internal conflicts, discursive shifts and changes of form, however. This element is the foundational principle of both radical and lesbian feminism: 'egalitarianism'. In this section I explore Diprose's claim that disciplinary regimes also constitute the embodied ethos of their subjects through looking at the ways 'egalitarianism' operates as a norm in radical and lesbian feminism. How egalitarianism operated in lesbian sexual relations was fully elaborated in the previous three chapters and does not need restating here. Instead, I am concerned with the regime's more general application in the everyday and political lives of radical and lesbian feminists. This is examined through Foucault's four elements of subjectivation.


35 Foucault, 'The Ethic of Care for the Self as a Practice of Freedom', p.2.
The 'ethical substance' of early radical and lesbian feminism consisted of reworking the whole self on the principle of egalitarianism. Deploying the maxim 'the political is personal', universal compliance with egalitarianism was solicited. This 'mode of subjection' often took the form of an injunction that, if a feminist was seriously committed to ending oppression, then she had an obligation to embody and live out egalitarian ideals in her own life. In earlier chapters I indicated some of the 'self-forming' activity through which radical and lesbian feminists attempted to rid themselves of inculcated 'male' patterns of dominant and subordinate behaviours and desires. Chapters 3 and 4 briefly discussed how various 'transgressions' could be identified in others, or confessed to in oneself, and rooted out through spiritual practices, therapy and group correction (consciousness-raising) in order to achieve a 'pure' feminist consciousness or state of being. The 'telos' of this exercise, then, was the attainment of a mode of being which embodied the ethos of egalitarianism.

I now turn to a consideration of several other self-forming activities to which all radical and lesbian feminists were expected to accede in the name of coming to embody an ethos of egalitarianism. The disciplinary effects of these practices provoked resistance which resulted in bitter conflict and a 'crisis' of difference in radical and lesbian feminism. The self-forming activities I examine here are practices of anti-classism, anti-racism, anti-elitism, egalitarian collective self-organizing in personal and political-social life, and 'egalitarian' resignification and re-formation of the body.36

In terms of everyday life, egalitarianism translated into an expected renunciation of the privileges of race and class, as well as the trappings of domination and privilege: leadership and 'elitism'. Class privilege was to be renounced in the belief that to benefit from its advantages was to contribute to the continuation of oppression.37 Anti-racism required white women to work on their own racism and act in solidarity with black and third world women's struggles.38 Notably, these prescriptions sat in some

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36 In terms of collective group living see, for example, 'A Radicalesbian Lifestyle', Refractory Girl, Summer 1974, pp.12-15.


38 Alice, Gordon, Debbie and Mary, 'Problems of Our Movement', pp.380-381.
tension with radical feminism's proclamation that the struggle against male domination must assume first priority for all women.

Constituting oneself as an ethical subject of radical feminism often called for self-reflection, as in Marilyn Frye's fretting over her privileged position as a well-paid academic. After much soul-searching, she justified continuing to work in the academy by arguing that acting for social change required the material support, educational and other resources that her position conferred. The problem then became one of the ethical use of the luxuries and privileges of her position. Accordingly, her code of ethical conduct held that:

a feminist can conscientiously hold and use an establishment position, if she is simultaneously cultivating skills, attitudes, identity and an alternative community, with and in which she can function without that position, and which will keep her honest while she has it.\(^39\)

Disavowing class privilege often took the form of a practice of 'downward mobility' for well-off feminists, in which conspicuous consumption was eschewed and all community members' financial resources were pooled for redistribution according to need.\(^40\) Anti-classist practice also required avoiding the use of 'big words' and professional jargon on the basis that elitism was secured by its mystifying (thereby monopolizing) simple truths and concepts. In this sense, anti-intellectualism within early radical feminism was not only associated with a rejection of 'male' reason, as noted in Chapter 4, but also with undermining class relations amongst feminists.\(^41\)

Egalitarian principles extended into organizational structures and decision-making practices of feminist groups. Egalitarianism installed an anti-hierarchical, anti-elitist ethos which led to collective modes of organizing and decision-making by consensus. In practice, achieving the latter required the deployment of disciplinary practices designed to


equalize participation. These practices included rules on time limits for speaking, or speaking time having to be purchased with tokens equally allocated to all participants. Through such practices, it was anticipated that the advantages of class, race and education would be overcome and the potential for articulate women to take control of decision-making subverted. Similarly, a lot system for allocating work was often introduced to forestall the likelihood of the group’s ‘shit work’ (typing, tea-making, envelope stuffing etc.) falling to the least privileged members.\footnote{Echols, op.cit., pp.150,179; The Feminists, op.cit., pp.371-372; Redstockings, ‘Manifesto’, p.535.}

Radical and lesbian feminism’s disciplinary moral code did not only regulate the relations between individuals but constituted an ethos to be embodied. Egalitarianism could be literally written on the body. Patriarchal femininity and its accoutrements - high heels, tight skirts, makeup, long hair, ‘feminine’ comportment - were seen by radical feminists as signs of female slavery, as a sign of that individual woman’s ‘slave’ mentality, and of women’s status as men’s adornment. In what Elizabeth Grosz\footnote{E. Grosz, ‘Inscriptions and Body Maps: Representations and the Corporal’, in T. Threadgold and A. Cranny-Francis (eds), Feminine, Masculine and Representation, North Sydney, Allen and Unwin, 1990, pp.84-95.} would describe as a ‘counterstrategic reinscription’ of the body, lesbian feminists in particular developed new dress codes and body styles. Natural fibre clothing and the eschewal of make-up signified authenticity; overalls, flannelette work-shirts signified strength, utility and solidarity with the working class; plain, loose clothing which afforded freedom of movement signified a ‘free’ woman.\footnote{Daly, Gyn/Ecology, pp.340-341; Jeffrey’s, Anticlimax, pp.169-170; Hoagland, Lesbian Ethics, p.181.}

The transformation of the female body into a liberated woman’s body also involved training it and endowing it with new capacities. Many women took up traditional male manual skills and trades in order to be self-sufficient as well as to be able to literally build and maintain Lesbian Nation. Many took up martial arts so as to better physically defend themselves against male attack. These bodies signified the strong, self-assured, self-determining independent lesbians of lesbian feminist discourse, albeit through traditional masculine codes and values.\footnote{Daly, Gyn/Ecology, p.341.} Given the moral force of the injunctions to embody egalitarianism through extinguishing signs of femininity, most lesbian feminists reacted with
horror to the appearance of 'lipstick lesbians' in the 1980s.46 Lipstick
lesbians themselves often took their 'feminine' body practices to be a
mode of resistance to lesbian feminism's 'Maoist' (bland and uniform)
style of disciplinary dress and 'masculine' modes of corporeality.47

The normalizing and disciplinary practices of egalitarianism were
most rigorously applied in the self-proclaimed vanguard groups, The
Feminists and Cell 16. In accordance with the type of analysis of sexual
relations represented by Atkinson - sex (as both gender difference and
sexual activity) as patriarchy, and therefore celibacy as its revolutionary
personal-political strategy - The Feminists set a quota on the number of
'married' women who could be members. This meant that no more than
one-third of the membership of The Feminists could be in a sexual
relationship with a man. Members could be expelled for not coming to the
required number of meetings, or for failing to do their political
'homework'.46

The norm of egalitarianism, and its anti-leadership, anti-elitist ethos,
worked to discipline those radical and lesbian feminists who emerged as
leaders or gained public notoriety, as was inevitable when media
attention focussed on their newly published books. Such individuals were
subject to reprimand and even expulsion from the groups to which they
belonged. In this disciplinary context, consciousness-raising groups
functioned as courts of inquisition of those individuals. Firestone, Millett,
Johnston, Atkinson, Morgan and Brown were amongst those severely
criticized, denounced or 'purged' for elitism and 'star tripping'. Many of
these censured women, feeling bruised and battered, left the women's
movement as a result.49

46 The term 'lipstick lesbians' refers to lesbians who wear makeup and fashionable clothes including dresses. See
Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers*, Chapter 11; I. Blackman and K. Perry, 'Skirting the Issue: Lesbian
Fashion for the 1990s', *Feminist Review*, No.34, Spring 1990, pp.67-78. To their critics, Julia Penelope for
instance (Call Me Lesbian, pp.78-97), 'lipstick lesbians' were out to destroy the lesbian political movement because
they undermined what it meant to be a lesbian in heteropatriarchy (that is, resisting the category 'woman' and
femininity).

47 Note, however, that some lesbian cultural feminists took to traditional (feminine or 'hippie') women's clothing as a
sign of their celebration of the 'female principle'.


49 For accounts of such events see Echos, op.cit., pp.150-151,181-182,192-193,198,204-210,238; Alice, Gordon,
Debbie and Mary, 'Problems of Our Movement', pp.386-388. Freeman, op.cit., pp.120-122; Brown, A Plain Brown
Rapper, pp.18,139-150. Atkinson's dramatic 'resignation' from the women's liberation movement in 1971 was
delivered in a vitriolic statement which is reproduced in Amazon Odyssey, pp.213-221.
In these ways, radical feminism operated as a disciplinary regime. Radical feminists were caught in a normalizing web of watching, confessing, judging, intervening, correcting themselves and each other. It is an instance of Foucault's observation of the operations of power that, in subjecting oneself to normalizing power, one then becomes its instrument.\(^50\) This complicity in the discipline and surveillance of self and others produced, in its subjects, a fraught 'docility': an uneasy normalization to egalitarianism.

Radical and lesbian feminism's moral code of egalitarianism produced other effects of domination. Egalitarianism often led to what Joreen (Jo Freeman) called a 'tyranny of structurelessness' and ineffectuality in feminist political organizing. Here, an anti-leadership ethos and concurrent lack of organizational structures had only worked to encourage covert power struggles and the domination of those organizations by the most articulate members.\(^51\) Through its anti-racist, anti-classist and anti-heterosexist values, the radical feminist moral code established a 'hierarchy of oppression'\(^52\) in which moral virtue accrued to subjects in inverse proportion to class and race status. Working class, non-white and non-anglo women were held to be morally superior to middle-class anglo, white women by virtue of their poverty and powerlessness, qualities believed to attest to their moral innocence in a corrupt society. Further, because of radical feminism's Enlightenment supposition of an oppositional (rather than constitutive) relationship between truth and power, the greater one's oppression (powerlessness) and moral virtue, the closer one was to the truth. This led to the prefacing of public statements by a recitation of the speaker's credentials of oppression, to establish not only one's legitimate membership of a particular group but also, more importantly, the veracity of what one was about to say.\(^53\) The hierarchy of oppression also silenced white, anglo, middle-class (and heterosexual or bisexual) radical feminists, though


\(^{53}\) Fuss, *Essentially Speaking*, pp.116-117 gives a good classroom example in a mixed-sex context.
morality was conferred on them insofar as they complied with the egalitarian code.

Having associated truth with feelings, as I noted in Chapter 4, cultural feminism devalued the educational privileges of middle-class women through characterizing them as out of touch with their feelings and ignoring gut responses in exclusive favour of abstract theorizing. Working-class women, by virtue of less education in comparison to middle-class women, were deemed to be closer to their 'instincts' and therefore to the 'truth'. One way to establish a truthful speaking position in this regard was to affect a 'working-class accent' in written work.

Many power effects of the hierarchy of oppression were resisted and contested not by white middle-class women (who had no legitimate speaking position in anti-classist discourses) but by those who held impeccable working-class credentials. Rita Mae Brown, for instance, claimed that the imitation of poverty and anti-consumerism of downward mobility "is the greatest insult yet devised by middle-class people against the working-class". Brown claimed that, like all working-class people, she had no desire to live in poverty. She also took offence at middle-class women's parody of working-class speech in their attempt to disavow their class background. As a college-educated woman, Brown also disagreed with the anti-intellectualism often associated with anti-classism. Similarly, Robin Morgan chastised feminists who called for women to drop out of college and organize working-class women in factories.

This discussion illustrates Foucault's contention that 'liberation' (of women or lesbian desire, within the 'liberated zone' of the feminist movement) does not solve the problem of how to act ethically. Radical

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54 Alice, Gordon, Debbie and Mary, 'Problems of Our Movement', pp.381-382.
55 A working-class accent is signified in American English by dropping the letter "g" from the end of words. See, for example, the Revolutionary Lesbians, 'Battle Fatigue', and 'They Tried to Make It Personal' (first published in 1971), in Hoagland and Penelope (eds), op.cit., pp.178-181; A. Hollibaugh and C. Moraga, 'What We're Rollin Around in Bed With. Sexual Silences in Feminism: A Conversation toward Ending Them', in Siltow et al., op.cit., pp.395-405. This device was most often used by women to signify their working class roots.
56 Brown, A Plain Brown Rapper, p.103. See also Alice, Gordon, Debbie and Mary, 'Problems of Our Movement', p.383.
58 Morgan, Going Too Far, p.189.
and lesbian feminists' prescriptions on proper egalitarian conduct, presumed to represent transparently universal and self-evident moral principles derived from the 'truth', can instead be seen as an exercise of normalizing power. 'Proper' egalitarian feminist behaviour was a moral code produced, deployed, contested and resisted in and through those power relations. Consequently, by the late 1970s, many individuals' attempts to constitute themselves as ethical subjects of radical and lesbian feminism left them feeling confused, exhausted and defeated. The radical and lesbian feminist moral code was increasingly perceived as a tyranny in itself, particularly by those it rendered inarticulate - white, heterosexual and bisexual, middle-class feminists, as well as by the newly emerging 'sex radicals'. The code came to be seen as imposed by a feminist 'thought police' and the normalizing confessional aspect of consciousness-raising itself exposed and characterized as 'fascist'.

Despair over the 'failures' of anti-racist efforts left feminists like Marilyn Frye uncertain of how to act correctly in relation to black and working-class women. Frye reports the paralysis induced by a crisis in moral and intellectual confidence as her anti-racist efforts were themselves construed as racist, tokenistic and paternalistic. Her response to feminism's failure to provide reliable moral guidance on such questions took the form of questioning the need for an ethics which promotes a form of moral agency that makes judgements on what is right and what is wrong. Arguing that this form of ethics and ethical agency is both the province and burden of privileged groups, Frye then claimed that moral judgement and righteous behaviour itself is implicated in the pursuit of race and class privilege. Further, feminists' moral compulsion to be 'good', for Frye, simply reinscribed women into patriarchal femininity. 'Ethics', at least in the form practiced by earlier radical and lesbian feminism, was to her oppressive and ought to be abandoned. Frye therefore welcomed the publication in 1988 of Sarah Lucia Hoagland's Lesbian Ethics, which she saw as not so much promoting a new set of moral rules, and rules of right and wrong action but, rather, as

59 Raymond, A Passion for Friends, pp.163-164; Echols, op.cit., pp.179,210; Brown, A Plain Brown Rapper, p.17. Like Echols and Rubin (though on different grounds), Raymond saw this confessional practice and judgements on women's lives as a perversion of the principle 'the personal is the political'.
the subtitle 'Toward New Value' suggested, an open-ended exploration of creating new meaning.  

The following discussion of lesbian ethics focuses on Sarah Lucia Hoagland's book of that name. As the most elaborated and influential exposition of lesbian ethics, I take her position to be paradigmatic of a self-referential school of thought that includes Marilyn Frye, Julia Penelope, Janice Raymond and, less centrally, Mary Daly and writers associated with the journal Lesbian Ethics. Points at which Hoagland's work either disagrees with or directly borrows from the work of these others is registered through footnotes.

III. LESBIAN ETHICS AS AN AESTHETICS OF EXISTENCE

Hoagland's impetus for writing Lesbian Ethics was her concern about the state of the lesbian community in the U.S. in the 1980s. As she saw it, conflict within the community and the demise of lesbian projects and businesses was partly due to ongoing problems of racism, classism, imperialism, antisemitism, ablebodilyism, sizism, ageism, heterosexism and sexism. Of equal concern to Hoagland, however, was lesbians' preparedness to attack, lie to, manipulate, guilt-trip, scapegoat and in other ways attempt to control each other. These behaviours, to her, undermined lesbianism as a united force capable of resisting and overcoming oppression.  

For Hoagland, these behaviours reproduce, within the lesbian community, habitual survival responses and strategies of control developed under conditions of patriarchal domination. Compounding the problem, according to Hoagland, is lesbians' reliance on anglo-european ethical values to guide their relations to each other and to make moral judgements. In a critique of Western masculinist philosophy which sometimes echoes, but does not engage with, the work of feminist philosophers noted in Chapter 3, Hoagland claims that the norms of anglo-european ethical theory are problematic for women. However, in

60 Frye, Willful Virgin, pp.139-145. See also the essays 'White Woman Feminist' (pp.147-169) in this collection, and 'On Being White' in The Politics of Reality (pp.110-127).

61 Hoagland, Lesbian Ethics, pp.1-2.
characterizing these norms as promoting relations of domination and subordination which support patriarchal social control, her analysis is much closer to Sheila Jeffreys'.

Central to the oppressive operations of traditional ethics, for Hoagland, is the existence of a system of rigid moral rules and principles. Hoagland therefore believes that appeals to rules, standards and principles as the foundation of moral choice in the lesbian community is a coercive practice designed to make other lesbians behave. The attempt to apply a moral code within the lesbian community is therefore not only a form of oppressive control, but is also futile. According to Hoagland, rules, principles and standards go against the lesbian's ontological refusal to conform. Further, as she observed, what constitutes anti-racist, anti-classist and right and wrong feminist behaviour is contestable within the feminist and lesbian community. For all these reasons, Hoagland saw a need to rethink lesbian ethical practice.

*Lesbian Ethics,* then, represents Hoagland's attempt to create a new ethics on grounds different to traditional masculinist ethics and its problematic values. It seeks to move beyond patriarchal ethics' central value of domination and subordination through a transformation of language, perception and consciousness. Hoagland's ethics is not about formulating a new set of rules but is rather about enabling and developing individual integrity and agency in relation to others. This new ethics requires a certain kind of female agency not defined, as 'woman' is in patriarchy, in terms of another (specifically, 'man'). For Hoagland, because lesbian existence is a condition of 'negation' within patriarchy, the 'lesbian' is a category of experience outside patriarchal signification: a category without content, an experience to be invented. Figuring 'lesbian' in this way, Hoagland therefore claims that in 'being lesbian' lies the possibility of creating a new female agency. The realization of this agency, however, necessitates a *lesbian* ethics.

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62 Ibid., pp.1-2,10-12,100. Here, Hoagland explicitly draws on Adrienne Rich's 1975 essay 'Woman and Honor: Some Notes on Lying' (in *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence*, pp.185-194), in which Rich claimed that lying was a survival strategy developed by women in patriarchy.

63 Hoagland, *Lesbian Ethics*, pp.6,10-11,181.

64 Ibid., pp.6-7,9,11-13,15,20-22. See also Frye (whom Hoagland cites here), 'To Be And Be Seen: The Politics of Reality', pp.152-174 in *The Politics of Reality*, for an earlier elaboration of the idea of the lesbian as 'outside' meaning. Frye here takes the difficulty in arriving at a clear definition of lesbianism to signal not its contestability as a term but its 'logical impossibility'.

As her explicit debt to Wittig suggests, Hoagland’s lesbian ethics can be taken as another instance of ‘lesbian utopics’. I intend to show in the following discussion what is already evident in the preceding outline of the project: that Hoagland’s category ‘lesbian’ is not ontologically ‘empty’ but is already constituted through radical and lesbian feminist precepts.\footnote{Hoagland explicitly acknowledges her radical feminist positioning in ‘Why Lesbian Ethics’, pp.195-196.}

As therefore located within traditional Western epistemological frameworks (against its own self-characterization as exterior to them), lesbian ethics is shown in the end to reproduce the problems that it ostensibly sought to overcome - in particular, the problematic of difference and the subjection of lesbians to lesbian feminism’s disciplinary regime. These problematics are drawn out in my exposition of Hoagland’s ethics through the categories of its ‘ethical substance’, its ‘mode of subjection’, its ‘self forming activity’ and its ‘telos’.

The ethical substance

Lesbian ethics’ ‘ethical substance’ consists of the racist, classist and other behaviours Hoagland observed and which she problematizes with reference to the concept of ‘heterosexualism’. Heterosexualism, the defining value of patriarchy, is “a way of living that normalizes the dominance of one person and the subordination of another”.\footnote{Hoagland, Lesbian Ethics, p.7. Hoagland’s concept of ‘Heterosexualism’ is akin to Raymond’s ‘hetero-reality’ and ‘hetero-relations’, and Penelope’s ‘heteropatriarchy’.}

Hoagland defines subordination as a state of ‘femininity’ in which “the values of dominance and subordination are embedded in perceptual judgement of reality as if they were the essence of those involved.”\footnote{Ibid., p.46. See also pp.37-38.} In women, ‘femininity’ represents a condition of inculcated perception in which women take themselves to be the stereotypical, fluffy-headed housewives of patriarchal propaganda and, therefore, inferior and naturally subordinate to men. For Hoagland, it is through embracing ‘femininity’ that women become ‘woman’, a category defined by men and to which women are expected to conform. The category ‘woman’, Hoagland asserts, is:
(1) male-identified, someone whose identity emerges through her relationship to a man, (2) someone who makes herself attractive to men, (3) an object to be conquered by men, and (4) a breeder (of boys).\textsuperscript{68}

Central to Hoagland's ethical project, however, is a notion of female subjectivity which characterizes women as agents capable of making a choice to transform themselves without the benefit of a vanguard party. In Hoagland's view, women, as active (but not 'free') agents, are necessarily always-already resistant to patriarchy (for what active agent would choose to submit to oppression?). What, then, can explain their continued identification with the category 'woman' and its central value of 'femininity'? Drawing on earlier radical feminist discourses of 'coercion' (see Chapter 3) and, more implicitly, role theory and its conditioning thesis, Hoagland promotes a theory of female agency in which women's choices are made under conditions of colonization and oppression. Further, to be a woman within the system of heterosexuality is "to be subject to male domination and hence to be someone who enacts her agency through manipulation - exercising (some modicum of) control from a position of subordination".\textsuperscript{69}

Constituting female agency as making choices under conditions of oppression, where resistance takes the form of subterfuge, sabotage and subtle manipulation, Hoagland proceeds to make determinations on the effectiveness of these strategies. Hoagland categorizes what she sees as instances of apparent submission to heterosexuality (for example, a woman becoming a right-wing anti-feminist) as 'survival choices'. Alcoholism, drug addiction, suicide and regularly burning the dinner are defined as 'self-defeating' resistive choices.\textsuperscript{70}

For Hoagland, the degree to which a woman has embraced 'femininity' determines whether she will act with more or less self-consciousness about her modes of resistance to patriarchy and what action she will take in the interests of her own survival. Hoagland

\textsuperscript{68} Ibid., p.37.
\textsuperscript{69} Ibid., p.53.
\textsuperscript{70} Ibid., pp.50-51. In constituting 'female agency', Hoagland here draws on and develops Frye's discussion of moral agency in The Politics of Reality, pp.54-57.
suggests that, where a woman is fully cognizant of her oppressed condition, her 'femininity' is feigned in the interests of her survival. On the other hand, a woman who totally identifies with 'femininity' and the category of 'woman' appears naively content to be controlled. In that case, Hoagland asserts, the woman is either oblivious to, or does not count her own 'resistive' behaviour in, say, regularly burning the dinner as defying her subjected condition. Rather, such a woman would see that event as another instance of her 'natural' feminine incompetence.\(^7\)

But if the lesbian is not a 'woman', on Hoagland's definition (above), how can their similar problematic behaviours be explained? According to Hoagland, because lesbians have been born and raised within the structures of heterosexuality, they, too, have internalized the values of dominance and subordination. Of most significance to Hoagland, in terms of her diagnosis of the state of lesbian communities, is the inculcation into lesbians of the 'feminine virtues'. These 'virtues' - altruism, self-sacrifice and vulnerability - Hoagland recasts as the 'virtues of subservience'. Hoagland argues that the virtues of altruism (being prepared to abandon one's own interests for the sake of another's), self-sacrifice (abandoning the pursuit of one's own needs and interests in order to dedicate oneself to another's) and vulnerability (making oneself vulnerable in order to engage with others and create trust) accrue only to those in feminized (subordinate, less powerful) positions. It is through these 'virtues' of the less powerful that the more powerful secure their domination. But, as I noted above, Hoagland believes that women have learned to exercise power from their subordinated position, developing strategies of control - such as manipulation, lying, deception - out of these feminine virtues. Additionally, Hoagland claims, within a lesbian community context lesbians are also able to assert control from a position of domination through 'paternalism': deciding for another lesbian what is best for her and what action she should take.\(^8\)

In summary, as Hoagland sees it, problems within the lesbian community can be understood as an outcome firstly of lesbians' unwitting incorporation of traditional (male) ethical values into the structure of their moral judgements. Secondly, lesbians' problematic behaviours are seen

\(^7\) Hoagland, *Lesbian Ethics*, pp.46,48-51.

\(^8\) Ibid., pp.69-71,73-76,82-83,85,87,89,100-101,120,143.
to be the result of habitually deploying the 'feminine virtues' and paternalistic domination in an attempt to assert control of a situation. For Hoagland, lesbians who use the virtues of altruism, self-sacrifice and vulnerability as yardsticks to measure other women's behaviour promote heterosexualism and function as instruments of patriarchy. Relations of domination and subordination then permeate interactions between women, undermining both lesbians' connection to each other and their community-building efforts.\(^{73}\)

This section has defined the 'ethical substance' of lesbian ethics: patterns of consciousness, feelings, desires and behaviours structured through the values of 'heterosexualism' (domination and subordination). The task of lesbian ethics is therefore one of "exploring ways to work the dominance and subordination of heterosexualism out of lesbian choices".\(^{74}\) In this way, Hoagland claims, lesbians might learn to use their power as active agents in a non-controlling way.

The ethical project of 'creating' this new form of female agency is necessarily, to Hoagland, one of lesbian separatism. Creating a new ethical agency that is not caught up in the values of domination and subordination, for Hoagland, necessarily entails withdrawing from the conceptual structures of 'heterosexualism', 'femininity' and the 'woman'/man' dichotomy. The condition of this ethical work, then, is a move to an 'outside' of existing (patriarchal) conceptual frameworks and values. Further, Hoagland advocates disengaging from patriarchal political structures, on the basis that to participate in them only affirms the central values of 'heterosexualism'. Here, Hoagland reiterates Frye's and Penelope's argument, noted in Chapter 4, that to withdraw energy from these structures will lead to them ceasing to exist.\(^{75}\) The 'right' choice, to Hoagland, then, is lesbian separatism. The next section identifies the potential subjects of lesbian ethics and how Hoagland invites them to take up its project.

\(^{73}\) Ibid., pp.3,104.

\(^{74}\) Ibid., p.8.

\(^{75}\) Ibid., pp.3,49-50,55-57,60-61. While she believes it is not possible to be remove oneself from material conditions, Hoagland nevertheless calls for withdrawing from capitalist economic exchange and developing a 'lesbian economics' (pp.81-82). On the other hand, Raymond, A Passion for Friends, pp.154,230-237, does not seem to support the type of separatism Hoagland promotes. Raymond sees separatism as a base for engagement with the world ("wordliness"). She believes that the dominant male ethos must be contested and transformed as must the relation between the sexes. In this sense, Raymond, unlike Hoagland (it seems), promotes the possibility of men and the power relations between the sexes changing.
The mode of subjection

Lesbian ethics, according to Hoagland, does not constitute a universal set of rules to live up to, in an attempt to be politically correct purists, or a mechanism to get other lesbians to act ethically. Rather, lesbian ethics is "a programme for lesbians who already want to be ethical, want to act with integrity". While lesbian ethics is ostensibly a voluntary political-ethical choice for those who accept its values, Hoagland clearly sets the parameters for who is and who is not to be interpellated as the subject of lesbian ethics and therefore to be included in the lesbian ethical exchange.

Lesbian ethics is a project for lesbians. However, lesbians per se have no automatic right of entry into Hoagland's ethical project. Hoagland refuses to define the category 'lesbian' on the grounds that to do so is to succumb to 'heterosexualism'. Yet, given Hoagland's allegiance to radical feminism and its central principle of 'egalitarianism', it is not surprising that lesbian sadomasochists and butch/femme lesbians are implicitly and sometimes explicitly excluded from the possibility of ethical agency. In enacting dominant and subordinate relations, according to Hoagland, these lesbians reinforce the values of 'heterosexualism' and prop up patriarchy. Apart from sadomasochists and butch/femme lesbians, some other lesbians (presumably 'cultural' lesbian feminists) are excluded from ethical agency on the grounds of their implication in the category 'woman'.

Hoagland not only constructs lesbian ethical agency through the exclusion of certain lesbians but also through the exclusion of other women. Those women who appeal to the feminine stereotype of peacemaker, nurturer and carer - members of the Greenham Common women's peace camp and the women's spirituality movement, for example - and feminist ethicists like Carol Gilligan are, to Hoagland, engaged in promoting 'heterosexualism'. Right-wing women are similarly excluded on grounds that they promote the core values of 'femininity'.

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76 Hoagland, Lesbian Ethics, p.22. See also p.59.
77 Ibid., pp.8,59,66-67,106. Hoagland's position on sadomasochism is set out in more detail in 'Sadism, Masochism, and Lesbian-Feminism, in Linden et al.(eds), op.cit., pp.153-163. The position is also Penelope's (Call Me Lesbian, pp.1-16), whom Hoagland cites on this topic. Hoagland also reiterates the lesbian feminist formulation of 'sex' as 'male' and abandons the concept in favour of lesbian 'desire' and 'eroticism' to signify relations of interaction and reciprocity (pp.166-168).
Hoagland also cites as grounds for disqualification what she believes to be signs of black women's succumbing to the traditional feminine role within black organizations, along with their prioritizing of race politics above gender politics. Given radical feminism's distrust of liberal reformism, via its Marxist antecedents, Hoagland similarly excludes from ethical agency feminists working within the political system. In doing so, she claims, these women affirm the values of 'heterosexualism' and fail to fundamentally challenge patriarchal principles and institutions.  

However, as if anticipating criticism from heterosexual feminists provoked by what could be taken as her call for political lesbianism, Hoagland sidesteps the issue through obfuscation, offering the cryptic remark that:

Heterosexual women can fit in this schema . . . However, they fit in exactly the way lesbians fit in heterosexual society. We fit there, but not as lesbians. Heterosexual women can fit here, though not as heterosexual women - that is, not as members of the category 'woman'.  

Like Sheila Jeffreys, Hoagland does not attempt (indeed, it is not possible) to delineate a category of heterosexuality uncontaminated by 'heterosexualism'. And given Hoagland's remark that “the conceptual category 'lesbian' - unlike the category 'woman' - is not irretrievably tied up with dominance and subordination as norms of behaviour” the new female agency must be coded ‘lesbian’. Hoagland's moral revolution, then, is a revolution of lesbians. But, given that it is possible for heterosexual women to be incorporated into Hoagland's schema under certain conditions, lesbian ethics can be seen as a call for political lesbianism.

Hoagland's reconstruction of lesbian feminist identity through the discourse of lesbian ethics is manifestly exacted at the cost of its traditional 'others': heterosexual and bisexual women, certain lesbians (s/m and butch/femme), and women who refuse to prioritize the gender

78 Hoagland, Lesbian Ethics, pp.49,51-53,57-58,83-86.
79 Ibid., p.8.
80 Ibid., p.68.
struggle over all others. Her refusal to directly specify the content of the category 'lesbian' does not conceal the category's constitution through what it is 'not': all those objects, concepts, persons who are in some way implicated in 'heterosexualism'. Yet the project requires subjects: women/lesbians who recognize themselves to be morally obliged to put lesbian ethics into practice. In what ways, then, are individuals interpellated as the subjects of lesbian ethics?

In ancient Greece, according to Foucault, the subjects of ethics (free men) were invited to recognize their moral obligation to develop the proper ethical attitude towards themselves - self-mastery - in the name of the well-being and survival of the community. The sign of self-mastery was the exercise of self-control and moderation in personal habits and in the exercise of their civic duties. For the Greeks, this disposition and its associated behaviours found an analogue in correct governance of the city so that one would not become a political despot and hence incite civil disorder. The ancient Greek aesthetics of existence, then, was implicated in the ethical subject's elite status in the community.\(^\text{81}\)

I want to suggest here that lesbian ethics' 'mode of subjection' comprises an injunction to lesbians to recognize their moral obligation to act ethically in the name of the survival of the lesbian community and the feminist cause more generally. When the lesbian community is held to be the only site of authentic resistance to patriarchal oppression,\(^\text{82}\) and the only hope of salvation from it, it is hard to resist the conclusion that lesbian ethics' represents a call to re-form the lesbian feminist vanguard. In this sense, lesbian ethics, in reasserting lesbian feminism's 'regime of truth' on sexuality, can be understood to constitute a 'counter-resistance' to 'sex radical' discourse on the ascendant in the 1980s.

**Self forming activity**

In constituting the subjects of lesbian ethics through an 'A/Not-A' binary construction, Hoagland re-installs the principle of identity (A=A) in which

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\(^{81}\) Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, pp.60-62,64-72,77.

\(^{82}\) Hoagland denies that she is engaged in the production of a coercive, normalizing 'true' discourse, claiming that lesbian ethics is only one possible choice. But she also claims (Lesbian Ethics, p.22) that to reject lesbian ethics implies a reversion to the traditional ethical forms which promote dominant and subordinate behaviour.
subjects are assumed to be equal by virtue of their 'sameness'. Because
the ethical subjects are 'the same' - that is, lesbians - a common ground
(shared values) is assumed. It is this common ground that constitutes, for
Hoagland, the basis for the lesbian community. And it is this spirit of
sameness, lesbianism, which suffuses the whole life of the self and the
community. Lesbian desire constitutes the bonding agent for community
cohesion, through which lesbianism will become a unified force to
overcome oppression. The correct disposition of lesbian ethical
subjects towards themselves is therefore, in Hoagland's scheme,
'autokoenony': a sense of 'self in community' in which the individual sees
themself as neither autonomous or dependent, but both separate and
connected.

Being equal to each other, on the basis of their 'sameness' as
lesbians, Hoagland does not see any fundamental conflict of interest or
essential antagonism between the subjects of lesbian ethics. But, of
course, it was the different class, race and other statuses amongst
lesbians that prompted Hoagland's ethical project in the first place. A
familiar problematic which reappears in lesbian ethics, then, is one of
addressing 'difference' in terms of the 'same'. In this section, I explore the
tension between the problem of difference within lesbian ethics and its
project of creating ways for lesbians to interact and work together without
being paternalistic, dominating and controlling. This tension is
highlighted through an investigation of lesbian ethics' self-forming
activity.

The practices of self to which lesbians must accede in order to
constitute themselves as ethical agents in Hoagland's scheme are
'attending' and 'intelligibility'. 'Attending' is a mode of interaction which,
when it involves helping another lesbian in crisis, is meant to offset a
tendency in the lesbian community to intervene, take over and apportion
blame. Through attending - that is, by listening, understanding, providing
reality checks, offering advice and generally lending support - the ethical
lesbian enables the lesbian in crisis to develop her own judgement and

Hoagland, Lesbian Ethics, pp.147,102,165-170. It is not lesbianism as a sexual activity which unites lesbians,
but rather lesbian 'desire' and 'eroticism' on which grounds community and new relationships may be built.

Ibid., p.145.

Ibid., pp.120-121,126,139,235-237,240.
make her own choices of action. Only in dire circumstances is it ethical for a lesbian to take control of the situation. Thus, 'attending' is an empowering exchange, not one of domination and control.\textsuperscript{86}

Hoagland recognizes that 'attending', as she conceives it, most easily proceeds when the participants share a common ground of experience and knowledge. That is, when the participants are of the same class, ethnicity, race and approximate age. Without an understanding of the class, race or other experience of the lesbian being attended to, the attendant's responses may not be appropriate or helpful. But, because she takes lesbians to be 'the same', despite these differences, Hoagland sees conflict amongst lesbians as fundamentally only a matter of misunderstanding. Proper attending, in the case of class, race and other differences, therefore requires an understanding of the different 'other'. Developing this understanding of other lesbians' perceptions, frameworks and realities, for Hoagland, proceeds by entering, through dialogue, into the world of the 'other'. At the same time, correction to the attendant's ignorance and misunderstanding (becoming non-racist etc.) proceeds through integrating the information and feedback from the 'other' into their (the attendant's) world.\textsuperscript{87}

This co-operative spirit of dialogic enquiry is carried through into the practice of 'intelligibility' in relation to the ethical subject's choices. Rather than being accountable to and judged by each other and the community, ethical lesbians are, rather, called on to 'explain' their choices. This practice requires self-understanding which, in Hoagland's scheme, is clearly based on the rationalist presumption of self-transparency. It is through 'intelligibility', Hoagland believes, that ethical lesbians can disagree with others' choices without asserting a condemning judgement.\textsuperscript{88}

'Attending' and 'intelligibility' can be likened to Habermas's and Arendt's model of ideal communication and its concomitant concept of

\textsuperscript{86} Ibid., pp.127-129. 'Attending' is based on Fyfe's concept of 'the loving eye' (The Politics of Reality, pp.72-76) and is similar to Raymond's concept of 'thoughtfulness' (A Passion for Friends, pp.218-223). 'Attending' is also distinguished from 'therapism', which all these writers tend to criticize on the grounds of the inherent relation of domination and subordination between therapist and patient. See Hoagland, Lesbian Ethics, pp.133-136; Raymond, A Passion for Friends, pp.155-162.

\textsuperscript{87} Hoagland, Lesbian Ethics, pp.131-132,138,142-143,242.

\textsuperscript{88} Ibid., pp.113,221-222,226-228.
'interactive rationality'. The problem with this model's claim to account for the other's difference through interactive dialogue lies, as Diprose points out,\textsuperscript{89} in its suppositions about subjectivity and power relations. Working within a Foucauldian schema, Diprose poses the problem that, if one's sexed (and, I would add, raced, classed etc.) identity is an embodied effect of one's specific socio-historical context, how is it possible to abstract oneself from this to include consideration of the differences of the concrete other? To imagine that one can do so requires a conception of a core self which is both transparent to the self and remains unaffected by the dialogue. But, if subjectivity is constituted \textit{through} the dialogue, as Diprose suggests, the question of what discourse the subjects are speaking, and constituting themselves through, is introduced.

For Diprose, that a dialogue is necessary at all attests to the different status of the participants' embodied ethos, even when an ontological equality is posited as the condition of the dialogue. In the practice of communicative interaction, then, Diprose believes that "the constitutive effects of dialogue are such that the difference would be subsumed under the norms within which the dialogue takes place".\textsuperscript{90} Diprose's observations suggest that lesbian ethics' practice of 'attending' may very well be the mechanism through which lesbian ethical subjects are reduced to a 'same' organized around the norms of lesbian feminist discourse.

\textit{Lesbian Ethics} evinces a constant tension between Hoagland's claim that there must be a common grounds, a reality consensus, for the sake of the lesbian community's survival and the end of oppression, and her concern to accommodate difference and not to be prescriptive. This leads Hoagland to propose that, beyond a certain starting point, there is no agreement about the values lesbians adopt. This starting point is specified as the "shared experiences and common interpretations of events in the real world".\textsuperscript{91} Besides the problematic notion of the 'shared experiences' of women of different race/class/ethnic etc. backgrounds,

\textsuperscript{89} Diprose, op.cit., pp.14,24-25.
\textsuperscript{90} Ibid., p.25.
\textsuperscript{91} Hoagland, \textit{Lesbian Ethics}, p.145. See also Penelope, \textit{Call Me Lesbian}, pp.91,93,95.
the 'common interpretation' Hoagland explicitly refers to is the radical feminist perspective.

Because Hoagland's ethics rests on the normative discourse of radical and lesbian feminism, the problem of difference remains. To reiterate Foucault's position: the ethical problem is not so much one of trying to dissolve power relations in the utopia of a perfectly transparent communication (which in any event produces effects of domination), rather, it is to develop 'practices of freedom' in which relations of power can be negotiated with a minimum of domination.92

In terms of the disciplinary effects on its subjects, Diprose further suggests that an ethics based on a model of 'interactive rationality' might also function as a confessional technology.93 This is apparent in Hoagland's ethics where those lesbians privileged by their dominant race, class etc. positionings, in 'confessing' their racism through the practice of 'attending', are expected to willingly submit to disciplinary correction. Given the assumption of transparency of what constitutes racism, even after the experiences reported both by Hoagland and Frye (in which what constitutes 'racism' was manifestly contestable), it is likely that the practice of lesbian ethics would simply reproduce the disciplinary operations it sought to overcome.

Telos

The goal of lesbian ethics, its 'telos', is to effect, through the practices of 'attending' and 'intelligibility' motivated by a sense of 'autokoenony', a transformation of self into a being who is no longer in the habit of enacting oppressive values. It is to attain a mode of being in which lesbians do not participate in relations of domination and subordination. As necessarily effected 'outside' patriarchal conceptual structures and power relations, lesbian ethical agency suggests a correlate privileged feminist consciousness, although Hoagland does not pursue this claim. Although Hoagland's concrete examples suggests a politics of

92 Foucault, 'The Ethic of Care for the Self as a Practice of Freedom', p.18. Here, he is specifically referring to Habermas's ideal of Interactive communication.
93 Diprose, op.cit., p.24.
engagement, lesbian ethics, in the tradition of lesbian utopics, constructs authentic lesbian political-ethical agency to be 'elsewhere' to immediate, local and specific struggles.

As formulated by Hoagland, lesbian ethics does not constitute a Foucauldian aesthetics of existence, despite positioning itself against the disciplinary moral regime of earlier radical and lesbian feminism. First, lesbian ethics does not 'refuse' modern forms of subjectivity. Rather, it evinces a slippage, characteristic of radical and lesbian feminism, between humanist essentialism (expressed in a project of self 'discovery') and an Enlightenment project of self-creation. In its Enlightenment mode, evidenced by its unproblematized notions of self-presence, transparent communication and an oppositional (rather than constitutive) relation of power to subjectivity, lesbian ethics reasserts the rational sovereign subject of modernism. Second, rather than undertaking an historical-critical enquiry into the category 'lesbian', lesbian ethics, in positing self-understanding as the condition for ethical behaviour, promotes a hermeneutics of the self. Third, the continuing problem of difference within lesbian ethics works to reinstate hierarchical relations between itself and its disavowed 'others' (constituted as 'outside' the lesbian ethical exchange), as well as between its own subjects. Race, class and other differences between subjects of lesbian ethics are again subsumed within the primacy of gender relations. All its subjects are reduced to the (lesbian feminist) 'same'. In this sense, lesbian ethics represents the normative constitution of an ethos rather than a liberation from it. Finally, and related to this previous point, lesbian ethics disavows its own power operations (and the power relations immanent in all social relations) by constituting itself as inhabiting a utopic space 'outside' (patriarchal) power relations and patriarchal conceptual structures. However, Hoagland's incipient awareness of lesbian ethics' implication in those very frameworks and structures is evident in her comment that she finds lesbian ethical values empowering within patriarchy: "I once felt that these values were meaningless in patriarchy. I am no longer sure". 94 But, as I now move on to discuss, a Foucauldian aesthetics of existence is itself problematic in ways that are most significant for a feminist ethics and for an ethics of difference more generally.

94 Hoagland, 
Lesbian Ethics, p.22.
A critique of Foucault's ethics

Foucault's formulation of an 'aesthetics of existence' is explicitly founded on an Enlightenment conception of subjectivity which, as I noted in Chapter 3, is implicitly (and sometimes explicitly) coded male. An Enlightenment conception of subjectivity is thus a highly problematic basis for the elaboration of a feminist ethics. As an Enlightenment discourse, not only does a Foucauldian ethics necessarily reintroduce the problem of sexual and other difference, but it is also necessarily implicated in the problematic binary constructions of Western philosophy. The most obvious example is the self/society binary underpinning Foucault's claim that a contemporary aesthetics of existence is to be practiced apart from social, political and economic institutions in order to avoid the operation of disciplinary power. But given the Enlightenment's complicity in the development of normalizing power, by Foucault's own admission, and as the case of lesbian ethics has demonstrated, the practice of ethics apart from, or 'outside', social structures can re-install the very sorts of normalizing power relations Foucault (and lesbian ethical subjects) sought to overcome. Of course, as the case of lesbian ethics also demonstrates, the promotion of a practice of self 'outside' social structures represents a utopic disavowal that one's embodied ethos is constituted through lived relations to others. As Diprose sees the problem:

Evoking an aesthetics of self which is practiced apart from others and outside social institutions disavows, rather than avoids, this process of production of value involving the denigration of others.95

Foucault acknowledges that Greek ethics was an ethos constructed by free men at the cost of their 'others': women and slaves. It was, in fact, those very social, political and economic structures, and free men's privileged position in them, that constituted the conditions for their ethical practice as 'autonomous' agents. For Diprose, then, to suggest that women should practice a contemporary aesthetics of existence apart from the social, political and economic structures that effect their exclusion from social exchange is to perpetuate their exclusion. Further,

95 Diprose, op.cit., p.34.
Foucault fails to recognize the implication of that exclusion for the possibility of developing an ethics of sexual (or any) difference. For these reasons, Diprose believes that the practice of Foucauldian ethics would generate identity and value at the cost of others.\textsuperscript{96}

It is apparent that, in the case of the Greek and lesbian ethics, reciprocity, mutuality, respect and the negotiation of differences only proceeds in a relationship between equals, within a community of the 'same'. It seems that the principle of identity operative in traditional Western philosophy, and the discourses informed by it, works to promote a 'homosexual' ethics. These ethics of the 'same', as Diprose and Rosi Braidotti\textsuperscript{97} have also observed, elides sexual and other difference. To Diprose, then, a Foucauldian aesthetics of existence is not sufficient for an ethics of difference in general and sexual difference in particular.

Foucault's own contemporary ethic of permanent resistance and critique of our historical era, however, is suggestive of ways to counter the problem of difference. Recall that an historical-critical enquiry, for Foucault, entails an interrogation of how we came to be what we are which reveals the historical contingency of our identities. As Diprose suggests, a feminist ethico-political practice would necessarily interrogate the social, political and economic structures that have traditionally promoted masculinist norms at the cost and exclusion of women. Further, an ethico-politics of difference must necessarily involve an interrogation of the ways in which different selves are constituted through hierarchical social relations.\textsuperscript{98} The object of such an ethico-political practice is the transformation of those relations.

Foucault's ethic of permanent resistance is in this sense quite different from Greek and lesbian ethics of the 'same' which would necessarily break down were they to truly take account of the 'other'.\textsuperscript{99}

\textsuperscript{96} Ibid., pp.31-34. See Foucault's discussion of how Greek ethics was specifically constituted against women and femininity in The Use of Pleasure, pp.22,32-85. For further discussions on the problematics of Foucault's practice of ethics apart from social structures, see L. McNay, Foucault and Feminism, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1992, pp.77-78; Simons, op.cit., p.80.


\textsuperscript{98} Diprose, op.cit., pp.20,28,34.

\textsuperscript{99} Foucault, 'On the Genealogy of Ethics', p.346.
The fragility of Hoagland’s denigration and devaluation of women living ‘in the system’ of heterosexualism, for example, is illustrated through her recounting Maria Lugones’ experience of ‘entering the world’ of her mother. Cited as an example of ‘proper attending’, Hoagland reports that Lugones had previously assumed that her mother’s identity was ‘exhausted’ (fully specified and accounted for) by its highly constrained construction within mainstream Argentinian culture. Through entering the world of her mother, Hoagland reports, Lugones instead came to see that her mother’s life had other meanings for her and was in fact quite fulfilling.100 This example suggests that if ‘attending’ was truly successful, the denigration and devaluation of lesbian ethics’ ‘others’ would be impossible to sustain. But, of course, Hoagland’s ethical practice excludes engaging with those denigrated others, such that the possibility of a deconstructive confrontation is forestalled.

Lesbian ethics, as articulated by Hoagland, represents a reformulation of lesbian feminism. As such, it does not constitute a Foucauldian ‘aesthetics of existence’. But my criticism of lesbian ethics has highlighted the problem of difference within Foucault’s own ethical project, a problem I traced to his deployment of an Enlightenment conception of subjectivity. Nevertheless, Foucault’s ethical project of ‘becoming gay’ has had a formative influence on ‘Queer Theory’ of the 1990s. One of the tasks of the final chapter, then, is to critically explore how Foucault’s ethics have been taken up and developed by contemporary gay and lesbian theorists. In particular, I am concerned to track how the problematics of Foucauldian ethics identified in this chapter play out in Queer theory.

100 Hoagland, Lesbian Ethics, p.243.
CHAPTER 6

LESBIAN FEMINISM'S ETHICAL TURN

The previous chapter demonstrated some of the effects of the dividing practices operative in the constitution of 'true' lesbian feminist identity: the production of lesbian feminism's 'others' (categories of 'unauthentic' women and lesbians formed from its exclusions) and lesbian sadomasochists' subsequent resistance to and contestation of that 'othering'. But the debate over lesbian sadomasochism was also a moral-ethical debate: it was centrally concerned with how lesbians should live their lives and act in the world, particularly in their relations with other women. It is to this ethical dimension of feminism that I now turn.

In this chapter, I draw on Foucault's distinction between a normalizing moral code and an 'aesthetics of existence' to highlight some differences between pre- and post- sex wars radical and lesbian feminism. I argue that early radical and lesbian feminism promoted a set of prescriptive, universal feminist values and rules for action: a normalizing moral code in Foucault's sense of the term. Defining this ethos (manner of living and being) and demonstrating its normalizing and disciplining effects requires briefly revisiting early radical and lesbian feminist texts.

I then go on to argue that Sarah Lucia Hoagland's elaboration of a lesbian ethics in the aftermath of the sex wars, and self-consciously against the disciplinary effects of earlier radical and lesbian feminism's moral code, can be usefully understood as an attempt to constitute a Foucauldian 'aesthetics of existence': a voluntary practice of self where one constitutes one's own ethos without reference to a formal and disciplinary moral code. However, because it is essentially a reformulation of lesbian feminism, Hoagland's ethics is shown to reinscribe the modern forms of normative subjectivity that a Foucauldian aesthetics of existence is meant to subvert. Lesbian ethics, then, in practice reproduces the problematics it sought to overcome, particularly that of difference.
But neither is Foucauldian ethics immune from interrogation on this basis. I draw on feminist critiques of Foucault's ethics to show that his aesthetics of existence, based on masculinist models of ancient Greek ethics and Enlightenment conceptions of subjectivity, is problematic for a feminist ethical project. Identifying the ongoing modernist problematics residing within both lesbian and Foucauldian ethics is a prelude to my discussion of contemporary developments in Queer ethics in the final chapter.

I. FOUCAULT'S ETHICS

In his final works, Foucault turned to the problem of the subject or, rather, "the way a human being turns him- or herself into a subject". For Foucault, the power relations promoted by modern forms of governmentality, specifically rationalization, could be elucidated through an analysis of its forms of resistance. Foucault saw in contemporary political struggles - those of feminism, movements against psychiatry and medicine, prisoners' activism, the assertion of children's rights and the gay movement - a common resistance to the "government of individualization". All these struggles are in part, to Foucault, attacks on the 'submission of subjectivity', the form of power identified in Chapter 1 as being at work in the constitution of the modern homosexual subject. It is a form of power which "categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize and which others have to recognize in him". As movements against this form of power, the women's and gay movements, to Foucault, must necessarily call on individuals to 'refuse' what they are rather than attempt to 'discover' who they 'truly' are:

the political, ethical, social, philosophical problem of our days is not to try to liberate the individual from the state, and from the state's institutions, but to liberate us both from the state and from the type of individualization which is linked to the state. We have to promote new forms of subjectivity through the

1 Foucault, 'The Subject and Power', p.208.
2 Ibid., p.212.
3 Ibid., p.212.
refusal of this kind of individuality which has been imposed on us for several centuries.⁴

For Foucault, this struggle against both the state and forms of subjectivity promoted by the state introduces its own set of problematics. In the case of sexual conduct, Foucault notes the decline in the idea of morality as obedience to a code of rules, along with the disappearance of much of the previous legal intervention in individuals' personal, private lives. The vacuum created by the erosion of old modes of moral legitimization has left individuals to make up their own minds on moral conduct and to choose their own modes of existence. To Foucault, this new problematic of 'freedom' in contemporary liberal democracies is one of how, and on what basis, individuals are to give form and meaning to their pleasurable relations with others.⁵

The problem of freedom inheres in sexual liberation's repressive hypothesis. Here, the problem of how to act in the world is presumed to be solved upon the liberation of a sovereign subject who is understood to be already equipped with moral sensibility. The 'liberation of desires' and the lifting of sexual taboos has, however, not delivered its promise of perfect freedom, satisfying relations and a blueprint for living. Rather, for Foucault, the 'liberated' condition of contemporary sexual subjects has instead opened up new relationships of power which require regulation through 'practices of freedom'. Foucault contrasts what he sees as the necessary work of developing a new sexual ethic with liberation movements' attempts so far:

Recent liberation movements suffer from the fact that they cannot find any principle on which to base the elaboration of a new ethics. They need an ethics, but they cannot find any other ethics than an ethics founded on so-called scientific knowledge of what the self is, what desire is, what the unconscious is, and so on.⁶

⁴ Ibid., p.216.
For Foucault, then, the struggle against the 'submission of subjectivity' and against traditional, authoritarian modes of morality must lead to a reformulation of contemporary sexual politics. First, "from the idea that the self is not given to us, I think there is only one practical consequence: we have to create ourselves as a work of art".\textsuperscript{7} Second:

It seems to me that to use this ethical problem of the definition of practices of freedom is more important than the affirmation (and repetitious, at that) that sexuality or desire must be set free.\textsuperscript{8}

For Foucault, the problem facing contemporary individuals is how to conduct themselves as ethical subjects of sexuality within the new relations of power that liberation has opened up. How individuals are to engage in these 'games of power' with a minimum of domination in the absence of morality for Foucault necessitates a search for an 'aesthetics of existence'.\textsuperscript{9}

**Greek ethics**

Foucault's thinking on the possible form of a contemporary ethical practice based on creative self-production arose in the course of his historical investigations for *The Use Of Pleasure* and *The Care of the Self*, volumes two and three of *The History of Sexuality*. In those studies, he was concerned with the questions of how it was that modern individuals came to experience themselves as subjects of 'desire' and 'sexuality', and how sexual conduct came to be problematized to the extent that it became an object of moral solicitude and ethical conduct.\textsuperscript{10}

In his comparative study of pagan and Christian cultures, Foucault found in ancient Greek culture a model of ethical conduct, elements of which he believed might be usefully drawn on to construct a contemporary sexual ethic.

\textsuperscript{7} Ibid., p.351.
\textsuperscript{8} Foucault, 'The Ethic of Care for the Self as a Practice of Freedom', p.3.
\textsuperscript{9} Ibid., pp.3-4,18; Foucault, 'An Aesthetics of Existence', p.49.
In contrasting a Greek 'aesthetics of existence' to Christian moral codes, Foucault delineates two elements he believes are present in all systems of morality: a code of behaviour and forms of 'subjectivation' (submission) to that code. On Foucault's definition, a moral code is a set of values and rules of action that are recommended to individuals through the intermediary of various prescriptive agencies such as the family (in one of its roles), educational institutions, churches, and so forth.\footnote{Foucault, \textit{The Use of Pleasure}, p.25.}

Moral codes can be accompanied by mechanisms that enforce them, such as where their legal codification provides for punishment for infraction and non-compliance.\footnote{Foucault, \textit{An Aesthetics of Existence'}, p.49; Foucault, \textit{The Use of Pleasure}, pp.29-30. Note in \textit{The Return of Morality} p.252 the term 'subjectivation' is used to refer to the procedure by which one obtains the constitution of a subject or of a subjectivity.}

This quasi-juridical form of enforcing compliance to a moral code is only one possible form of subjectivation to that code. Conformation to a moral code not only involves a relation to the rules but also a relation to the self. All moralities therefore, to Foucault, promote models for establishing a relationship to the self through which individuals constitute themselves as subjects of moral conduct. These 'practices of self' are meant to ensure moral subjectivation, as in the Christian practices of self-decipherment and public examination (the confession).\footnote{Foucault, \textit{The Use of Pleasure}, p.30; Foucault, \textit{An Aesthetics of Existence'}, p.49.}

The difference between pagan and Christian moralities, for Foucault, lies in which of the two elements - the code or its forms of subjectivation - is emphasised. In Christianity the rules of the code are emphasised while in the more ethically-oriented moralities of ancient Greece (where there was little legal codification of sexual conduct), the emphasis was on forms of subjectivation. In Greece, exact observance of the code and rules of behaviour was less important than the relation to the self through which one voluntarily constituted oneself as an ethical subject of the code. Christian and pagan cultures can therefore be distinguished by their subjects' relations to the moral code. For Christians, adherence is universal and compulsory (with a view to normalizing the whole
population). In Greece, compliance was voluntary: an 'aesthetics of existence' was a personal choice which was the prerogative of a small elite.\textsuperscript{14}

Ancient Greece, with its minimal legal codification of sexual conduct, its problematization of sexual conduct not through prohibition but through the 'problem of freedom', its regulation of sexual conduct not so much by laws but through self-regulation, and its paradox of a freedom contingent on such self-restraint, provided for Foucault a striking parallel to contemporary circumstances.\textsuperscript{15} This did not mean that Foucault advocated adopting the Greek model for a contemporary ethics. As he put it: "you can't find the solution of a problem in the solution of another problem raised at another moment by other people".\textsuperscript{16} Indeed, he abhorred Greek ethics' links to a virile society, to dissymmetry, exclusion of the other, non-reciprocality of pleasure and obsession with penetration.\textsuperscript{17} Rather, what Foucault believed could be salvaged from the Greek experience of sexual morality was a model of a practice of liberty, an ethic of autonomous self-regulation without reference to a set of codified rules and a technique for how to live. He believed these principles could be turned to the development of a contemporary mode of self-management that could enable power relations to be conducted with a minimum of domination.\textsuperscript{18}

Importantly for Foucault, for the purposes of developing a contemporary aesthetics of existence, sexuality in Greece was a moral experience without a theory of the subject. The lack of a notion of an essential subject enabled wide diversity and great latitude in the Greeks' search for and development of styles of existence. It is this same opportunity which Foucault believed presents itself to contemporary individuals. The contemporary search for an aesthetics of existence is, therefore, not a search for a true self which draws on psychological techniques of self-decipherment but is rather the creation of the self as a

\textsuperscript{14} Foucault, The Use of Pleasure, pp.10,30-31; Foucault, 'An Aesthetics of Existence', p.49; Foucault, 'On the Genealogy of Ethics', pp.341,348,350,362.

\textsuperscript{15} Foucault, 'On the Genealogy of Ethics', p.343; Foucault, 'The Return of Morality', p.259.

\textsuperscript{16} Foucault, 'On the Genealogy of Ethics', p.343.

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., p.346.

\textsuperscript{18} Foucault, 'The Return of Morality', p.249; Foucault, 'The Ethic of Care for the Self as a Practice of Freedom', p.18; Foucault, 'On the Genealogy of Ethics', p.348.
work of art from the styles and inventions found in the cultural environment.  

**Enlightenment ethico-politics**

The starting point of this discussion was Foucault's call for the refusal of modern forms of subjectivity linked to the state and to normalizing regimes. Such a refusal, to Foucault, must correspond to the invention of new practices of self and new modes of subjectivity. This is a project which must by necessity proceed, as Foucault argues it did for the Greeks, without reference to political, social and economic structures. In refusing any analytical or necessary link between ethics and political, social and economic structures, Foucault here seems to advocate a radical retreat from politics to a purely private creation of self as a work of art. This interpretation, however, is undercut by the re-presentation of the project in 'What is Enlightenment?', an essay contemporaneous with his work on Greek ethics.

In 'What is Enlightenment', Foucault relocates elements of Greek ethics - taking oneself as the object of a complex and difficult elaboration of autonomous subjectivity, a freedom of conscience without subjection to authority, voluntary choice in modes of existence - in the more recent tradition of the Enlightenment. Indeed, his concern to distinguish between humanist and Enlightenment conceptions of subjectivity, noted in Chapter 4, was to recuperate the Enlightenment principle of "a critique and a permanent creation of ourselves in our autonomy" without summoning up the 'human essence' of humanist discourse.

Refigured as the 'philosophical ethos of modernity', these elements then take on a political dimension. For Foucault, the 'attitude' of modernity contains a political ethos of a permanent critique of our historical era. This ethos must involve a 'limit attitude': a practical critique

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21 Foucault, 'What is Enlightenment?', p.44.
22 ibid., pp.36,39,41-42,44.
that takes the form of possible transgression of the limits imposed on modern subjects. Unlike the Enlightenment's understanding of critique as ultimately revealing universal truths, Foucault's ethico-political project is concerned with asking how we came to be what we are. It is to interrogate what seems to be the natural and inevitable in one's own identity to reveal its contingency, and thence its possible overcoming. This involves a historical-critical enquiry, not a hermeneutics of the self.\textsuperscript{23}

The goal of such a project is not to reach some space of pure freedom 'outside' power (or even 'outside' modernity itself) or to effect global revolution. Rather, it is ethico-political work done at the limits of the self, where the possibility of transgression exists. On a broader scale, Foucault's is an ethico-political practice of situating/locating oneself in present conditions and structures in order to "grasp the points where change is possible and desirable, and to determine the precise form this change should take".\textsuperscript{24} It is through this political practice that partial, specific transformations may be effected.

Foucault anticipated and partially conceded the 'global/radical' (specifically Marxist) objection to such a strategy: that such partial transformations are limited and determined by larger social-political structures. But rather than seeing in that possible eventuality merely a delivery to co-option, assimilation and therefore failure (as Marxists and radicals would), Foucault rather saw it as delivery to a new (and different) starting point of resistance. The programmatic prescriptions and regimes of the 'global/radical' project, to Foucault, have only led to a return of the most 'dangerous' political traditions.\textsuperscript{25} Of his own ethic of permanent resistance, Foucault remarked:

\begin{quote}
My point is not that everything is bad, but that everything is dangerous, which is not exactly the same as bad. If everything is dangerous, then we always have something to do. So my position leads not to apathy but to a hyper- and pessimistic activism.\textsuperscript{26}
\end{quote}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{23} ibid., pp.42,45,50.
\textsuperscript{24} ibid., p.46.
\textsuperscript{25} ibid., pp.46-47.
\textsuperscript{26} Foucault, 'On the Genealogy of Ethics', p.343.
\end{flushright}
The main danger of articulating a contemporary ethico-political project within Enlightenment terms, as Foucault saw it, lay in the historical link between the modern individual's acquisition of capabilities and the concurrent growth in state power through procedures of discipline and normalization. The critical question for Foucault, then, is how the growth of individuals' capacities and their struggle for freedom (which he characterizes as growth in autonomy) may proceed without the intensification of power relations.  

**Becoming gay/becoming lesbian**

Foucault's most elaborated ethico-political project centred on the notion of 'becoming gay'. Wary of the tendency to relate the question of homosexuality to the problem of "Who am I?" and "What is the secret of my desire?", Foucault instead proposed that:

Perhaps it would be better to ask oneself, "What relations, through homosexuality, can be established, invented, multiplied and modulated?" The problem is not to discover in oneself the truth of sex but rather to use sexuality henceforth to arrive at a multiplicity of relationships. And no doubt that's the real reason why homosexuality is not a form of desire but something desirable. Therefore we have to work at becoming homosexuals and not be obstinate in recognizing that we are. The development towards which the problem of homosexuality tends is the one of friendship.

The political consequence of such a project, for Foucault, is the destabilization of normalizing regimes effected through the gay and lesbian community's creation of new forms of life, relationships, friendships, art and culture. How Foucault's concept of 'becoming gay' has been taken up in 'queer theory' is a subject of discussion in Chapter 7.

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27 Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?", pp.47-48. However, for Foucault, there is no other alternative but to start from where we are: located in the historical era of modernity, and as subjects of modernity (p.43).

28 M. Foucault, 'Friendship as a Way of Life', in S. Loronge (ed.), *Foucault Live*, New York, Semiotext(e), 1989, pp.203-204. See also Foucault, 'Sex, Power and the Politics of Identity', p.27 for a similar discussion.
How might Foucault's distinction between a normalizing moral code and an aesthetics of existence be applied to an analysis of the difference between pre- and post- 'sex wars' radical and lesbian feminism? Here I call on a variety of unrelated sources to help draw these connections. First, Rosalyn Diprose's\(^\text{29}\) elaboration of the links between modern disciplinary regimes of governance and the constitution of an embodied ethos (manner of being) co-extensive with those disciplinary regimes, works to refigure those regimes as disciplinary moral codes. Diprose's discussion here is suggestive for an analysis of radical and lesbian feminism. If radical and lesbian feminism are implicated in modern forms of normalizing power through their humanist and Enlightenment antecedents, they might well operate as disciplinary moral codes. This perspective on radical and lesbian feminism opens up a space both for an analysis of their moral codes and an investigation of the disciplinary practices through which the code constitutes the embodied ethos of their subjects.

Second, lesbian ethicists themselves have characterized the 'ethical problem' of feminism in terms similar to Foucault. The 'problem of freedom' is very much in evidence in Marilyn Frye's discussion of the moral dilemmas of feminism, for example. She observes that feminists' rejection and abandonment of patriarchal culture and values has created a moral void and a concomitant 'hunger' for ethics.\(^\text{30}\) Frye's response to this problem of freedom, articulated some years before the outbreak of the 'sex wars', was as follows: "For feminists, the permanent moral problem of how to live becomes a problem of how to live in accord with feminist values".\(^\text{31}\)

Third, post-'sex wars' lesbian ethics self-consciously constituted itself against what it claimed to be the oppressive moral code of earlier lesbian feminism, to which it often explicitly refers as a regime of 'political correctness'.\(^\text{32}\) Lesbian ethics, in positing a voluntary ethical project in which lesbianism is figured as a mode of being to be invented in a non-

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\(^\text{29}\) Diprose, op.cit., pp.21-24.


\(^\text{32}\) S. L. Hoagland, Lesbian Ethics. Toward New Value, Palo Alto CA, Institute of Lesbian Studies, 1988, pp.181-181. Hoagland does not mean by this criticism that she disagrees with 'political correctness' per se, however. It was rather its application (imposed rather than chosen) that bothered her.
oppressive relation to others, and proposing to create new kinds of relationships through lesbian sexuality, finds an echo in Foucault's notion of 'becoming gay'. Indeed, in Mark Blasius' elaboration of 'becoming gay', Hoagland's project is cited as representing such an ethics.33

Finally, Foucault's cryptic remark that, because of its creative possibilities, homosexuality might be something to be desired rather than a form of desire, is very suggestive for understanding the phenomenon of 'political lesbianism'. An often ignored and undertheorized feature of lesbian feminism was the 'mass conversion' of feminists to lesbianism in the early 1970s. For many of those women, this 'conversion' did not so much represent the discovery of their 'true', but previously repressed, lesbian desire as it did the taking up of a new subject position that offered the possibility a creating a new self and a new mode of being female beyond the confining norms of wife and mother. Political lesbianism can therefore be understood through a Foucauldian ethical schema to be a process of 'becoming lesbian'.

There is a further aspect to Foucault's ethics that needs to be outlined before I proceed to an analysis of pre- and post- 'sex war' lesbian feminism. Besides a moral code, ethical or moral systems promote 'modes of subjectivation', or means through which one forms oneself as an ethical subject. In The Use of Pleasure, Foucault delineates four elements constituting the modes of subjectivation operative in all moralities whether they be pagan, Christian or more contemporary practices of freedom.

The first element of subjectivation is the determination of the 'ethical substance': what aspect of the self is to be problematized and constituted as the object of moral practice. The ethical substance is the part of the self which is to be worked over and transformed so that one might constitute oneself as an ethical subject. The second element of subjectivation is the 'mode of subjection' or the means through which individuals come to recognize themselves as the subject of that moral rule such that they feel obliged to put it into practice. Subjection to the

moral rule involves a third element of subjectivation: 'self-forming activity'. Each morality promotes particular 'practices of self': 'technologies' and techniques through which the transformative work on the ethical substance is performed. The final element of subjectivation is the 'telos' or the moral goal of the exercise. The telos of ethical practice and proper conduct is the achievement of the mode of being desirable in that morality. In summary, subjectivation is an 'ascetical' practice which is "an exercise of self upon self by which one tries to work out, to transform one's self and to attain a certain mode of being". My discussion of earlier and later lesbian feminist moralities is loosely organized around these categories as they apply to the domain of lesbian feminist moral concern: relations between women.

II. RADICAL AND LESBIAN FEMINISM AS DISCIPLINARY MORAL CODES

My argument throughout this thesis is that radical and lesbian feminism can be understood as normalizing regimes legitimized by their truth claims. As I have shown, radical and lesbian feminism at various times have asserted different and sometimes conflicting claims about the 'true' condition of women under patriarchal rule, the 'true' form of women's liberated subjectivity and prescriptions for women's liberation. One element of radical and lesbian feminism has remained constant throughout all their internal conflicts, discursive shifts and changes of form, however. This element is the foundational principle of both radical and lesbian feminism: 'egalitarianism'. In this section I explore Diprose's claim that disciplinary regimes also constitute the embodied ethos of their subjects through looking at the ways 'egalitarianism' operates as a norm in radical and lesbian feminism. How egalitarianism operated in lesbian sexual relations was fully elaborated in the previous three chapters and does not need restating here. Instead, I am concerned with the regime's more general application in the everyday and political lives of radical and lesbian feminists. This is examined through Foucault's four elements of subjectivation.

35 Foucault, 'The Ethic of Care for the Self as a Practice of Freedom', p.2.
The 'ethical substance' of early radical and lesbian feminism consisted of reworking the whole self on the principle of egalitarianism. Deploying the maxim 'the political is personal', universal compliance with egalitarianism was solicited. This 'mode of subjection' often took the form of an injunction that, if a feminist was seriously committed to ending oppression, then she had an obligation to embody and live out egalitarian ideals in her own life. In earlier chapters I indicated some of the 'self-forming' activity through which radical and lesbian feminists attempted to rid themselves of inculcated 'male' patterns of dominant and subordinate behaviours and desires. Chapters 3 and 4 briefly discussed how various 'transgressions' could be identified in others, or confessed to in oneself, and rooted out through spiritual practices, therapy and group correction (consciousness-raising) in order to achieve a 'pure' feminist consciousness or state of being. The 'telos' of this exercise, then, was the attainment of a mode of being which embodied the ethos of egalitarianism.

I now turn to a consideration of several other self-forming activities to which all radical and lesbian feminists were expected to accede in the name of coming to embody an ethos of egalitarianism. The disciplinary effects of these practices provoked resistance which resulted in bitter conflict and a 'crisis' of difference in radical and lesbian feminism. The self-forming activities I examine here are practices of anti-classism, anti-racism, anti-elitism, egalitarian collective self-organizing in personal and political-social life, and 'egalitarian' resignification and re-formation of the body.\(^{36}\)

In terms of everyday life, egalitarianism translated into an expected renunciation of the privileges of race and class, as well as the trappings of domination and privilege: leadership and 'elitism'. Class privilege was to be renounced in the belief that to benefit from its advantages was to contribute to the continuation of oppression.\(^{37}\) Anti-racism required white women to work on their own racism and act in solidarity with black and third world women's struggles.\(^{38}\) Notably, these prescriptions sat in some

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\(^{36}\) In terms of collective group living see, for example, 'A Radicalessian Lifestyle', Refractory Girl, Summer 1974, pp.12-15.


\(^{38}\) Alice, Gordon, Debbie and Mary, 'Problems of Our Movement', pp.380-381.
tension with radical feminism's proclamation that the struggle against male domination must assume first priority for all women.

Constituting oneself as an ethical subject of radical feminism often called for self-reflection, as in Marilyn Frye's fretting over her privileged position as a well-paid academic. After much soul-searching, she justified continuing to work in the academy by arguing that acting for social change required the material support, educational and other resources that her position conferred. The problem then became one of the ethical use of the luxuries and privileges of her position. Accordingly, her code of ethical conduct held that:

a feminist can conscientiously hold and use an establishment position, if she is simultaneously cultivating skills, attitudes, identity and an alternative community, with and in which she can function without that position, and which will keep her honest while she has it.\textsuperscript{39}

Disavowing class privilege often took the form of a practice of 'downward mobility' for well-off feminists, in which conspicuous consumption was eschewed and all community members' financial resources were pooled for redistribution according to need.\textsuperscript{40} Anti-classist practice also required avoiding the use of 'big words' and professional jargon on the basis that elitism was secured by its mystifying (thereby monopolizing) simple truths and concepts. In this sense, anti-intellectualism within early radical feminism was not only associated with a rejection of 'male' reason, as noted in Chapter 4, but also with undermining class relations amongst feminists.\textsuperscript{41}

Egalitarian principles extended into organizational structures and decision-making practices of feminist groups. Egalitarianism installed an anti-hierarchical, anti-elitist ethos which led to collective modes of organizing and decision-making by consensus. In practice, achieving the latter required the deployment of disciplinary practices designed to

\textsuperscript{39} Frye, \textit{Willful Virgin}, p.35.
\textsuperscript{40} Faderman, \textit{Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers}, pp.236-237.
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., p.237; Brown, \textit{A Plain Brown Rapper}, p.101. For accounts of problems in feminist groups and communes and expulsions on the grounds of 'classist behaviour', see Echols, \textit{op.cit.}, pp.180,204-210,225,236-237; Brown, \textit{A Plain Brown Rapper}, pp.16-17.
equalize participation. These practices included rules on time limits for speaking, or speaking time having to be purchased with tokens equally allocated to all participants. Through such practices, it was anticipated that the advantages of class, race and education would be overcome and the potential for articulate women to take control of decision-making subverted. Similarly, a lot system for allocating work was often introduced to forestall the likelihood of the group's 'shit work' (typing, tea-making, envelope stuffing etc.) falling to the least privileged members.42

Radical and lesbian feminism's disciplinary moral code did not only regulate the relations between individuals but constituted an ethos to be embodied. Egalitarianism could be literally written on the body. Patriarchal femininity and its accoutrements - high heels, tight skirts, makeup, long hair, 'feminine' comportment - were seen by radical feminists as signs of female slavery, as a sign of that individual woman's 'slave' mentality, and of women's status as men's adornment. In what Elizabeth Grosz43 would describe as a 'counterstrategic reinscription' of the body, lesbian feminists in particular developed new dress codes and body styles. Natural fibre clothing and the eschewal of make-up signified authenticity; overalls, flannelette work-shirts signified strength, utility and solidarity with the working class; plain, loose clothing which afforded freedom of movement signified a 'free' woman.44

The transformation of the female body into a liberated woman's body also involved training it and endowing it with new capacities. Many women took up traditional male manual skills and trades in order to be self-sufficient as well as to be able to literally build and maintain Lesbian Nation. Many took up martial arts so as to better physically defend themselves against male attack. These bodies signified the strong, self-assured, self-determining independent lesbians of lesbian feminist discourse, albeit through traditional masculine codes and values.45 Given the moral force of the injunctions to embody egalitarianism through extinguishing signs of femininity, most lesbian feminists reacted with

45 Daly, Gyn/Ecology, p.341.
horror to the appearance of 'lipstick lesbians' in the 1980s. Lipstick lesbians themselves often took their 'feminine' body practices to be a mode of resistance to lesbian feminism's 'Maoist' (bland and uniform) style of disciplinary dress and 'masculine' modes of corporeality.

The normalizing and disciplinary practices of egalitarianism were most rigorously applied in the self-proclaimed vanguard groups, The Feminists and Cell 16. In accordance with the type of analysis of sexual relations represented by Atkinson - sex (as both gender difference and sexual activity) as patriarchy, and therefore celibacy as its revolutionary personal-political strategy - The Feminists set a quota on the number of 'married' women who could be members. This meant that no more than one-third of the membership of The Feminists could be in a sexual relationship with a man. Members could be expelled for not coming to the required number of meetings, or for failing to do their political 'homework'.

The norm of egalitarianism, and its anti-leadership, anti-elitist ethos, worked to discipline those radical and lesbian feminists who emerged as leaders or gained public notoriety, as was inevitable when media attention focussed on their newly published books. Such individuals were subject to reprimand and even expulsion from the groups to which they belonged. In this disciplinary context, consciousness-raising groups functioned as courts of inquisition of those individuals. Firestone, Millett, Johnston, Atkinson, Morgan and Brown were amongst those severely criticized, denounced or 'purged' for elitism and 'star tripping'. Many of these censured women, feeling bruised and battered, left the women's movement as a result.

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46 The term 'lipstick lesbians' refers to lesbians who wear makeup and fashionable clothes including dresses. See Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers*, Chapter 11; I. Blackman and K. Perry, 'Skirting the Issue: Lesbian Fashion for the 1990s', *Feminist Review*, No.34, Spring 1990, pp.67-78. To their critics, Julia Penelope for instance (in *Call Me Lesbian*, pp.78-97), 'lipstick lesbians' were out to destroy the lesbian political movement because they undermined what it meant to be a lesbian in heteropatriarchy (that is, resisting the category 'woman' and femininity).

47 Note, however, that some lesbian cultural feminists took to traditional (feminine or 'hippie') women's clothing as a sign of their celebration of the 'female principle'.


49 For accounts of such events see *Echoes*, op.cit., pp.150-151,181-182,192-193,198,204-210,238; Alice, Gordon, Debbie and Mary, 'Problems of Our Movement', pp.386-388. Freeman, op.cit., pp.120-122; Brown, *A Plain Brown Rapper*, pp.18,139-150. Atkinson's dramatic 'resignation' from the women's liberation movement in 1971 was delivered in a vitriolic statement which is reproduced in *Amazon Odyssey*, pp.213-221.
In these ways, radical feminism operated as a disciplinary regime. Radical feminists were caught in a normalizing web of watching, confessing, judging, intervening, correcting themselves and each other. It is an instance of Foucault’s observation of the operations of power that, in subjecting oneself to normalizing power, one then becomes its instrument.\(^50\) This complicity in the discipline and surveillance of self and others produced, in its subjects, a fraught ‘docility’: an uneasy normalization to egalitarianism.

Radical and lesbian feminism’s moral code of egalitarianism produced other effects of domination. Egalitarianism often led to what Joreen (Jo Freeman) called a ‘tyranny of structurelessness’ and ineffectuality in feminist political organizing. Here, an anti-leadership ethos and concurrent lack of organizational structures had only worked to encourage covert power struggles and the domination of those organizations by the most articulate members.\(^51\) Through its anti-racist, anti-classist and anti-heterosexist values, the radical feminist moral code established a ‘hierarchy of oppression’\(^52\) in which moral virtue accrued to subjects in inverse proportion to class and race status. Working class, non-white and non-anglo women were held to be morally superior to middle-class anglo, white women by virtue of their poverty and powerlessness, qualities believed to attest to their moral innocence in a corrupt society. Further, because of radical feminism’s Enlightenment supposition of an oppositional (rather than constitutive) relationship between truth and power, the greater one’s oppression (powerlessness) and moral virtue, the closer one was to the truth. This led to the prefaceing of public statements by a recitation of the speaker’s credentials of oppression, to establish not only one’s legitimate membership of a particular group but also, more importantly, the veracity of what one was about to say.\(^53\) The hierarchy of oppression also silenced white, anglo, middle-class (and heterosexual or bisexual) radical feminists, though


\(^{53}\) Fuss, *Essentially Speaking*, pp.116-117 gives a good classroom example in a mixed-sex context.
morality was conferred on them insofar as they complied with the egalitarian code.

Having associated truth with feelings, as I noted in Chapter 4, cultural feminism devalued the educational privileges of middle class women through characterizing them as out of touch with their feelings and ignoring gut responses in exclusive favour of abstract theorizing. Working class-women, by virtue of less education in comparison to middle-class women, were deemed to be closer to their 'instincts' and therefore to the 'truth'.\footnote{Alice, Gordon, Debbie and Mary, 'Problems of Our Movement', pp.381-382.} One way to establish a truthful speaking position in this regard was to affect a 'working-class accent' in written work.\footnote{A working-class accent is signified in American English by dropping the letter "g" from the end of words. See, for example, the Revolutionary Lesbians, 'Battle Fatigue', and 'They Tired to Make It Personal' (first published in 1971), in Hoegland and Penelope (eds), op.cit., pp.178-181; A. Hollibaugh and C. Moraga, 'What We're Rollin Around in Bed With. Sexual Silences in Feminism: A Conversation toward Ending Them', in Siltow et.al., op.cit., pp.395-405. This device was most often used by women to signify their working class roots.}

Many power effects of the hierarchy of oppression were resisted and contested not by white middle-class women (who had no legitimate speaking position in anti-classist discourses) but by those who held impeccable working-class credentials. Rita Mae Brown, for instance, claimed that the imitation of poverty and anti-consumerism of downward mobility "is the greatest insult yet devised by middle-class people against the working-class".\footnote{Brown, A Plain Brown Rapper, p.103. See also Alice, Gordon, Debbie and Mary, 'Problems of Our Movement', p.383.} Brown claimed that, like all working-class people, she had no desire to live in poverty. She also took offence at middle-class women's parody of working-class speech in their attempt to disavow their class background. As a college-educated woman, Brown also disagreed with the anti-intellectualism often associated with anti-classism.\footnote{Brown, A Plain Brown Rapper, pp.97-106. See also Alice, Gordon, Debbie and Mary, 'Problems of Our Movement', pp.381-384.} Similarly, Robin Morgan chastised feminists who called for women to drop out of college and organize working-class women in factories.\footnote{Morgan, Going Too Far, p.189.}

This discussion illustrates Foucault's contention that 'liberation' (of women or lesbian desire, within the 'liberated zone' of the feminist movement) does not solve the problem of how to act ethically. Radical
and lesbian feminists' prescriptions on proper egalitarian conduct, presumed to represent transparently universal and self-evident moral principles derived from the 'truth', can instead be seen as an exercise of normalizing power. 'Proper' egalitarian feminist behaviour was a moral code produced, deployed, contested and resisted in and through those power relations. Consequently, by the late 1970s, many individuals' attempts to constitute themselves as ethical subjects of radical and lesbian feminism left them feeling confused, exhausted and defeated. The radical and lesbian feminist moral code was increasingly perceived as a tyranny in itself, particularly by those it rendered inarticulate - white, heterosexual and bisexual, middle-class feminists, as well as by the newly emerging 'sex radicals'. The code came to be seen as imposed by a feminist 'thought police' and the normalizing confessional aspect of consciousness-raising itself exposed and characterized as 'fascist'.

Despair over the 'failures' of anti-racist efforts left feminists like Marilyn Frye uncertain of how to act correctly in relation to black and working-class women. Frye reports the paralysis induced by a crisis in moral and intellectual confidence as her anti-racist efforts were themselves construed as racist, tokenistic and paternalistic. Her response to feminism's failure to provide reliable moral guidance on such questions took the form of questioning the need for an ethics which promotes a form of moral agency that makes judgements on what is right and what is wrong. Arguing that this form of ethics and ethical agency is both the province and burden of privileged groups, Frye then claimed that moral judgement and righteous behaviour itself is implicated in the pursuit of race and class privilege. Further, feminists' moral compulsion to be 'good', for Frye, simply reinscribed women into patriarchal femininity. 'Ethics', at least in the form practiced by earlier radical and lesbian feminism, was to her oppressive and ought to be abandoned. Frye therefore welcomed the publication in 1988 of Sarah Lucia Hoagland's Lesbian Ethics, which she saw as not so much promoting a new set of moral rules, and rules of right and wrong action but, rather, as

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59 Raymond, A Passion for Friends, pp.163-164; Echols, op.cit., pp.179,210; Brown, A Plain Brown Rapper, p.17. Like Echols and Rubin (though on different grounds), Raymond saw this confessional practice and judgements on women's lives as a perversion of the principle 'the personal is the political'.

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the subtitle 'Toward New Value' suggested, an open-ended exploration of creating new meaning.\textsuperscript{60}

The following discussion of lesbian ethics focuses on Sarah Lucia Hoagland's book of that name. As the most elaborated and influential exposition of lesbian ethics, I take her position to be paradigmatic of a self-referential school of thought that includes Marilyn Frye, Julia Penelope, Janice Raymond and, less centrally, Mary Daly and writers associated with the journal \textit{Lesbian Ethics}. Points at which Hoagland's work either disagrees with or directly borrows from the work of these others is registered through footnotes.

III. LESBIAN ETHICS AS AN AESTHETICS OF EXISTENCE

Hoagland's impetus for writing \textit{Lesbian Ethics} was her concern about the state of the lesbian community in the U.S. in the 1980s. As she saw it, conflict within the community and the demise of lesbian projects and businesses was partly due to ongoing problems of racism, classism, imperialism, antisemitism, ablebodilyism, sizism, ageism, heterosexism and sexism. Of equal concern to Hoagland, however, was lesbians' preparedness to attack, lie to, manipulate, guilt-trip, scapegoat and in other ways attempt to control each other. These behaviours, to her, undermined lesbianism as a united force capable of resisting and overcoming oppression.\textsuperscript{61}

For Hoagland, these behaviours reproduce, within the lesbian community, habitual survival responses and strategies of control developed under conditions of patriarchal domination. Compounding the problem, according to Hoagland, is lesbians' reliance on anglo-european ethical values to guide their relations to each other and to make moral judgements. In a critique of Western masculinist philosophy which sometimes echoes, but does not engage with, the work of feminist philosophers noted in Chapter 3, Hoagland claims that the norms of anglo-european ethical theory are problematic for women. However, in

\textsuperscript{60} Frye, \textit{Wild' Virgin}, pp.138-145. See also the essays 'White Woman Feminist' (pp.147-169) in this collection, and 'On Being White' in \textit{The Politics of Reality}'(pp.110-127).

\textsuperscript{61} Hoagland, \textit{Lesbian Ethics}, pp.1-2.
characterizing these norms as promoting relations of domination and subordination which support patriarchal social control, her analysis is much closer to Sheila Jeffreys'.

Central to the oppressive operations of traditional ethics, for Hoagland, is the existence of a system of rigid moral rules and principles. Hoagland therefore believes that appeals to rules, standards and principles as the foundation of moral choice in the lesbian community is a coercive practice designed to make other lesbians behave. The attempt to apply a moral code within the lesbian community is therefore not only a form of oppressive control, but is also futile. According to Hoagland, rules, principles and standards go against the lesbian's ontological refusal to conform. Further, as she observed, what constitutes anti-racist, anti-classist and right and wrong feminist behaviour is contestable within the feminist and lesbian community. For all these reasons, Hoagland saw a need to rethink lesbian ethical practice.

Lesbian Ethics, then, represents Hoagland's attempt to create a new ethics on grounds different to traditional masculinist ethics and its problematic values. It seeks to move beyond patriarchal ethics' central value of domination and subordination through a transformation of language, perception and consciousness. Hoagland's ethics is not about formulating a new set of rules but is rather about enabling and developing individual integrity and agency in relation to others. This new ethics requires a certain kind of female agency not defined, as 'woman' is in patriarchy, in terms of another (specifically, 'man'). For Hoagland, because lesbian existence is a condition of 'negation' within patriarchy, the 'lesbian' is a category of experience outside patriarchal signification: a category without content, an experience to be invented. Figuring 'lesbian' in this way, Hoagland therefore claims that in 'being lesbian' lies the possibility of creating a new female agency. The realization of this agency, however, necessitates a lesbian ethics.

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62 Ibid., pp.1-2,10-12,100. Here, Hoagland explicitly draws on Adrienne Rich's 1975 essay 'Woman and Honor: Some Notes on Lying' (in On Lies, Secrets, and Silence, pp.185-194), in which Rich claimed that lying was a survival strategy developed by women in patriarchy.

63 Hoagland, Lesbian Ethics, pp.6,10-11,181.

64 Ibid., pp.6-7,9,11-13,15,20-22. See also Frye (whom Hoagland cites here), 'To Be And Be Seen: The Politics of Reality', pp.152-174 in The Politics of Reality, for an earlier elaboration of the idea of the lesbian as 'outside' meaning. Frye here takes the difficulty in arriving at a clear definition of lesbianism to signal not its contestability as a term but its 'logical impossibility'.
As her explicit debt to Wittig suggests, Hoagland's lesbian ethics can be taken as another instance of 'lesbian utopias'. I intend to show in the following discussion what is already evident in the preceding outline of the project: that Hoagland's category 'lesbian' is not ontologically 'empty' but is already constituted through radical and lesbian feminist precepts. 65 As therefore located within traditional Western epistemological frameworks (against its own self-characterization as exterior to them), lesbian ethics is shown in the end to reproduce the problems that it ostensibly sought to overcome - in particular, the problematic of difference and the subjection of lesbians to lesbian feminism's disciplinary regime. These problematics are drawn out in my exposition of Hoagland's ethics through the categories of its 'ethical substance', its 'mode of subjection', its 'self forming activity' and its 'telos'.

The ethical substance

Lesbian ethics' 'ethical substance' consists of the racist, classist and other behaviours Hoagland observed and which she problematizes with reference to the concept of 'heterosexualism'. Heterosexualism, the defining value of patriarchy, is "a way of living that normalizes the dominance of one person and the subordination of another". 66 Hoagland defines subordination as a state of 'femininity' in which "the values of dominance and subordination are embedded in perceptual judgement of reality as if they were the essence of those involved." 67 In women, 'femininity' represents a condition of inculcated perception in which women take themselves to be the stereotypical, fluffy-headed housewives of patriarchal propaganda and, therefore, inferior and naturally subordinate to men. For Hoagland, it is through embracing 'femininity' that women become 'woman', a category defined by men and to which women are expected to conform. The category 'woman', Hoagland asserts, is:

65 Hoagland explicitly acknowledges her radical feminist positioning in 'Why Lesbian Ethics', pp.195-196.
66 Hoagland, Lesbian Ethics, p.7. Hoagland's concept of 'Heterosexualism' is akin to Raymond's 'hetero-reality' and 'hetero-relations', and Penelope's 'heteropatriarchy'.
67 Ibid., p.46. See also pp.37-38.
(1) male-identified, someone whose identity emerges through her relationship to a man, (2) someone who makes herself attractive to men, (3) an object to be conquered by men, and (4) a breeder (of boys).\textsuperscript{68}

Central to Hoagland’s ethical project, however, is a notion of female subjectivity which characterizes women as agents capable of making a choice to transform themselves without the benefit of a vanguard party. In Hoagland’s view, women, as active (but not ‘free’) agents, are necessarily always-already resistant to patriarchy (for what active agent would choose to submit to oppression?). What, then, can explain their continued identification with the category ‘woman’ and its central value of ‘femininity’? Drawing on earlier radical feminist discourses of ‘coercion’ (see Chapter 3) and, more implicitly, role theory and its conditioning thesis, Hoagland promotes a theory of female agency in which women’s choices are made under conditions of colonization and oppression. Further, to be a woman within the system of heterosexuality is “to be subject to male domination and hence to be someone who enacts her agency through manipulation - exercising (some modicum of) control from a position of subordination”.\textsuperscript{69}

Constituting female agency as making choices under conditions of oppression, where resistance takes the form of subterfuge, sabotage and subtle manipulation, Hoagland proceeds to make determinations on the effectiveness of these strategies. Hoagland categorizes what she sees as instances of apparent submission to heterosexuality (for example, a woman becoming a right-wing anti-feminist) as ‘survival choices’. Alcoholism, drug addiction, suicide and regularly burning the dinner are defined as ‘self-defeating’ resistive choices.\textsuperscript{70}

For Hoagland, the degree to which a woman has embraced ‘femininity’ determines whether she will act with more or less self-consciousness about her modes of resistance to patriarchy and what action she will take in the interests of her own survival. Hoagland

\textsuperscript{68} Ibid., p.37.
\textsuperscript{69} Ibid., p.53.
\textsuperscript{70} Ibid., pp.50-51. In constituting ‘female agency’, Hoagland here draws on and develops Frye’s discussion of moral agency in The Politics of Reality, pp.54-57.
suggests that, where a woman is fully cognizant of her oppressed condition, her 'femininity' is feigned in the interests of her survival. On the other hand, a woman who totally identifies with 'femininity' and the category of 'woman' appears naively content to be controlled. In that case, Hoagland asserts, the woman is either oblivious to, or does not count her own 'resistive' behaviour in, say, regularly burning the dinner as defying her subjected condition. Rather, such a woman would see that event as another instance of her 'natural' feminine incompetence.\footnote{Hoagland, \textit{Lesbian Ethics}, pp.46,48-51.}

But if the lesbian is not a 'woman', on Hoagland's definition (above), how can their similar problematic behaviours be explained? According to Hoagland, because lesbians have been born and raised within the structures of heterosexuality, they, too, have internalized the values of dominance and subordination. Of most significance to Hoagland, in terms of her diagnosis of the state of lesbian communities, is the inculcation into lesbians of the 'feminine virtues'. These 'virtues' - altruism, self-sacrifice and vulnerability - Hoagland recasts as the 'virtues of subservience'. Hoagland argues that the virtues of altruism (being prepared to abandon one's own interests for the sake of another's), self-sacrifice (abandoning the pursuit of one's own needs and interests in order to dedicate oneself to another's) and vulnerability (making oneself vulnerable in order to engage with others and create trust) accrue only to those in feminized (subordinate, less powerful) positions. It is through these 'virtues' of the less powerful that the more powerful secure their domination. But, as I noted above, Hoagland believes that women have learned to exercise power from their subordinated position, developing strategies of control - such as manipulation, lying, deception - out of these feminine virtues. Additionally, Hoagland claims, within a lesbian community context lesbians are also able to assert control from a position of domination through 'paternalism': deciding for another lesbian what is best for her and what action she should take.\footnote{Ibid., pp.69-71,73-76,82-83,85,87,89,100-101,120,143.}

In summary, as Hoagland sees it, problems within the lesbian community can be understood as an outcome firstly of lesbians' unwitting incorporation of traditional (male) ethical values into the structure of their moral judgements. Secondly, lesbians' problematic behaviours are seen
to be the result of habitually deploying the 'feminine virtues' and paternalistic domination in an attempt to assert control of a situation. For Hoagland, lesbians who use the virtues of altruism, self-sacrifice and vulnerability as yardsticks to measure other women's behaviour promote heterosexuality and function as instruments of patriarchy. Relations of domination and subordination then permeate interactions between women, undermining both lesbians' connection to each other and their community-building efforts.\footnote{Ibid., pp.3,104.}

This section has defined the 'ethical substance' of lesbian ethics: patterns of consciousness, feelings, desires and behaviours structured through the values of 'heterosexuality' (domination and subordination). The task of lesbian ethics is therefore one of "exploring ways to work the dominance and subordination of heterosexuality out of lesbian choices".\footnote{Ibid., p.8.} In this way, Hoagland claims, lesbians might learn to use their power as active agents in a non-controlling way.

The ethical project of 'creating' this new form of female agency is necessarily, to Hoagland, one of lesbian separatism. Creating a new ethical agency that is not caught up in the values of domination and subordination, for Hoagland, necessarily entails withdrawing from the conceptual structures of 'heterosexuality', 'femininity' and the 'woman'/man' dichotomy. The condition of this ethical work, then, is a move to an 'outside' of existing (patriarchal) conceptual frameworks and values. Further, Hoagland advocates disengaging from patriarchal political structures, on the basis that to participate in them only affirms the central values of 'heterosexuality'. Here, Hoagland reiterates Frye's and Penelope's argument, noted in Chapter 4, that to withdraw energy from these structures will lead to them ceasing to exist.\footnote{Ibid., pp.3,49-50,53-55,57,60-61. While she believes it is not possible to be remove oneself from material conditions, Hoagland nevertheless calls for withdrawing from capitalist economic exchange and developing a 'lesbian economics' (pp.81-82). On the other hand, Raymond, A Passion for Friends, pp.154,230-237, does not seem to support this kind of separatism. Hoagland promotes, Raymond seems separatism as a basis for engagement with the world ('wordliness'). She believes that the dominant male ethos must be contested and transformed as must the relation between the sexes. In this sense, Raymond, unlike Hoagland (it seems), promotes the possibility of men and the power relations between the sexes changing.} The 'right' choice, to Hoagland, then, is lesbian separatism. The next section identifies the potential subjects of lesbian ethics and how Hoagland invites them to take up its project.
The mode of subjection

Lesbian ethics, according to Hoagland, does not constitute a universal set of rules to live up to, in an attempt to be politically correct purists, or a mechanism to get other lesbians to act ethically. Rather, lesbian ethics is "a programme for lesbians who already want to be ethical, want to act with integrity".  
While lesbian ethics is ostensibly a voluntary political-ethical choice for those who accept its values, Hoagland clearly sets the parameters for who is and who is not to be interpellated as the subject of lesbian ethics and therefore to be included in the lesbian ethical exchange.

Lesbian ethics is a project for lesbians. However, lesbians per se have no automatic right of entry into Hoagland's ethical project. Hoagland refuses to define the category 'lesbian' on the grounds that to do so is to succumb to 'heterosexualism'. Yet, given Hoagland's allegiance to radical feminism and its central principle of 'egalitarianism', it is not surprising that lesbian sadomasochists and butch/femme lesbians are implicitly and sometimes explicitly excluded from the possibility of ethical agency. In enacting dominant and subordinate relations, according to Hoagland, these lesbians reinforce the values of 'heterosexualism' and prop up patriarchy. Apart from sadomasochists and butch/femme lesbians, some other lesbians (presumably 'cultural' lesbian feminists) are excluded from ethical agency on the grounds of their implication in the category 'woman'.

Hoagland not only constructs lesbian ethical agency through the exclusion of certain lesbians but also through the exclusion of other women. Those women who appeal to the feminine stereotype of peacemaker, nurturer and carer - members of the Greenham Common women's peace camp and the women's spirituality movement, for example - and feminist ethicists like Carol Gilligan are, to Hoagland, engaged in promoting 'heterosexualism'. Right-wing women are similarly excluded on grounds that they promote the core values of 'femininity'.

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76 Hoagland, Lesbian Ethics, p.22. See also p.59.

77 Ibid., pp.8,59,66-67,106. Hoagland's position on sadomasochism is set out in more detail in 'Sadism, Masochism, and Lesbian-Feminism, in Linden et.al.(eds), op.cit., pp.153-163. The position is also Penelope's (Call Me Lesbian, pp.1-16), whom Hoagland cites on this topic. Hoagland also reiterates the lesbian feminist formulation of 'sex' as 'male' and abandons the concept in favour of lesbian 'desire' and 'eroticism' to signify relations of interaction and reciprocity (pp.166-169).
Hoagland also cites as grounds for disqualification what she believes to be signs of black women's succumbing to the traditional feminine role within black organizations, along with their prioritizing of race politics above gender politics. Given radical feminism's distrust of liberal reformism, via its Marxist antecedents, Hoagland similarly excludes from ethical agency feminists working within the political system. In doing so, she claims, these women affirm the values of 'heterosexualism' and fail to fundamentally challenge patriarchal principles and institutions.\(^{78}\)

However, as if anticipating criticism from heterosexual feminists provoked by what could be taken as her call for political lesbianism, Hoagland sidesteps the issue through obfuscation, offering the cryptic remark that:

> Heterosexual women can fit in this schema . . . However, they fit in exactly the way lesbians fit in heterosexual society. We fit there, but not as lesbians. Heterosexual women can fit here, though not as heterosexual women - that is, not as members of the category 'woman'.\(^{79}\)

Like Sheila Jeffreys, Hoagland does not attempt (indeed, it is not possible) to delineate a category of heterosexuality uncontaminated by 'heterosexualism'. And given Hoagland's remark that "the conceptual category 'lesbian' - unlike the category 'woman' - is not irretrievably tied up with dominance and subordination as norms of behaviour"\(^{80}\) the new female agency must be coded 'lesbian'. Hoagland's moral revolution, then, is a revolution of lesbians. But, given that it is possible for heterosexual women to be incorporated into Hoagland's schema under certain conditions, lesbian ethics can be seen as a call for political lesbianism.

Hoagland's reconstruction of lesbian feminist identity through the discourse of lesbian ethics is manifestly exacted at the cost of its traditional 'others': heterosexual and bisexual women, certain lesbians (s/m and butch/femme), and women who refuse to prioritize the gender

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\(^{78}\) Hoagland, Lesbian Ethics, pp.49,51-53,57-58,83-86.

\(^{79}\) Ibid., p.8.

\(^{80}\) Ibid., p.68.
struggle over all others. Her refusal to directly specify the content of the category 'lesbian' does not conceal the category's constitution through what it is 'not': all those objects, concepts, persons who are in some way implicated in 'heterosexualism'. Yet the project requires subjects: women/lesbians who recognize themselves to be morally obliged to put lesbian ethics into practice. In what ways, then, are individuals interpellated as the subjects of lesbian ethics?

In ancient Greece, according to Foucault, the subjects of ethics (free men) were invited to recognize their moral obligation to develop the proper ethical attitude towards themselves - self-mastery - in the name of the well-being and survival of the community. The sign of self-mastery was the exercise of self-control and moderation in personal habits and in the exercise of their civic duties. For the Greeks, this disposition and its associated behaviours found an analogue in correct governance of the city so that one would not become a political despot and hence incite civil disorder. The ancient Greek aesthetics of existence, then, was implicated in the ethical subject's elite status in the community.81

I want to suggest here that lesbian ethics' 'mode of subjection' comprises an injunction to lesbians to recognize their moral obligation to act ethically in the name of the survival of the lesbian community and the feminist cause more generally. When the lesbian community is held to be the only site of authentic resistance to patriarchal oppression, 82 and the only hope of salvation from it, it is hard to resist the conclusion that lesbian ethics' represents a call to re-form the lesbian feminist vanguard. In this sense, lesbian ethics, in reasserting lesbian feminism's 'regime of truth' on sexuality, can be understood to constitute a 'counter-resistance' to 'sex radical' discourse on the ascendant in the 1980s.

Self forming activity

In constituting the subjects of lesbian ethics through an 'A/Not-A' binary construction, Hoagland re-installs the principle of identity (A=A) in which

81 Foucault, The Use of Pleasure, pp.60-62,64-72,77.
82 Hoagland denies that she is engaged in the production of a coercive, normalizing 'true' discourse, claiming that lesbian ethics is only one possible choice. But she also claims (Lesbian Ethics, p.22) that to reject lesbian ethics implies a reversion to the traditional ethical forms which promote dominant and subordinate behaviour.
subjects are assumed to be equal by virtue of their 'sameness'. Because the ethical subjects are 'the same' - that is, lesbians - a common ground (shared values) is assumed. It is this common ground that constitutes, for Hoagland, the basis for the lesbian community. And it is this spirit of sameness, lesbianism, which suffuses the whole life of the self and the community. Lesbian desire constitutes the bonding agent for community cohesion, through which lesbianism will become a unified force to overcome oppression. The correct disposition of lesbian ethical subjects towards themselves is therefore, in Hoagland's scheme, 'autokoenony': a sense of 'self in community' in which the individual sees themself as neither autonomous or dependent, but both separate and connected.

Being equal to each other, on the basis of their 'sameness' as lesbians, Hoagland does not see any fundamental conflict of interest or essential antagonism between the subjects of lesbian ethics. But, of course, it was the different class, race and other statuses amongst lesbians that prompted Hoagland's ethical project in the first place. A familiar problematic which reappears in lesbian ethics, then, is one of addressing 'difference' in terms of the 'same'. In this section, I explore the tension between the problem of difference within lesbian ethics and its project of creating ways for lesbians to interact and work together without being paternalistic, dominating and controlling. This tension is highlighted through an investigation of lesbian ethics' self-forming activity.

The practices of self to which lesbians must accede in order to constitute themselves as ethical agents in Hoagland's scheme are 'attending' and 'intelligibility'. 'Attending' is a mode of interaction which, when it involves helping another lesbian in crisis, is meant to offset a tendency in the lesbian community to intervene, take over and apportion blame. Through attending - that is, by listening, understanding, providing reality checks, offering advice and generally lending support - the ethical lesbian enables the lesbian in crisis to develop her own judgement and

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83 Hoagland, Lesbian Ethics, pp.147,102,165-170. It is not lesbianism as a sexual activity which unites lesbians, but rather lesbian 'desire' and 'eroticism' on which grounds community and new relationships may be built.

84 Ibid., p.145.

85 Ibid., pp.120-121,126,139,235-237,240.
make her own choices of action. Only in dire circumstances is it ethical for a lesbian to take control of the situation. Thus, 'attending' is an empowering exchange, not one of domination and control.\textsuperscript{86}

Hoagland recognizes that 'attending', as she conceives it, most easily proceeds when the participants share a common ground of experience and knowledge. That is, when the participants are of the same class, ethnicity, race and approximate age. Without an understanding of the class, race or other experience of the lesbian being attended to, the attendant's responses may not be appropriate or helpful. But, because she takes lesbians to be 'the same', despite these differences, Hoagland sees conflict amongst lesbians as fundamentally only a matter of misunderstanding. Proper attending, in the case of class, race and other differences, therefore requires an understanding of the different 'other'. Developing this understanding of other lesbians' perceptions, frameworks and realities, for Hoagland, proceeds by entering, through dialogue, into the world of the 'other'. At the same time, correction to the attendant's ignorance and misunderstanding (becoming non-racist etc.) proceeds through integrating the information and feedback from the 'other' into their (the attendant's) world.\textsuperscript{87}

This co-operative spirit of dialogic enquiry is carried through into the practice of 'intelligibility' in relation to the ethical subject's choices. Rather than being accountable to and judged by each other and the community, ethical lesbians are, rather, called on to 'explain' their choices. This practice requires self-understanding which, in Hoagland's scheme, is clearly based on the rationalist presumption of self-transparency. It is through 'intelligibility', Hoagland believes, that ethical lesbians can disagree with others' choices without asserting a condemning judgement.\textsuperscript{88}

'Attending' and 'intelligibility' can be likened to Habermas's and Arendt's model of ideal communication and its concomitant concept of

\textsuperscript{86} Ibid., pp.127-129. 'Attending' is based on Frye's concept of 'the loving eye' (\textit{The Politics of Reality}, pp.72-76) and is similar to Raymond's concept of 'thoughtfulness' (\textit{A Passion for Friends}, pp.218-223). 'Attending' is also distinguished from 'therapists', which all these writers tend to criticize on the grounds of the inherent relation of domination and subordination between therapist and patient. See Hoagland, \textit{Lesbian Ethics}, pp.133-136; Raymond, \textit{A Passion for Friends}, pp.155-162.


\textsuperscript{88} Ibid., pp.113,221-222,228-229.
'interactive rationality'. The problem with this model's claim to account for
the other's difference through interactive dialogue lies, as Diprose points
out,\textsuperscript{89} in its suppositions about subjectivity and power relations. Working
within a Foucauldian schema, Diprose poses the problem that, if one's
sexed (and, I would add, raced, classed etc.) identity is an embodied
effect of one's specific socio-historical context, how is it possible to
abstract oneself from this to include consideration of the differences of
the concrete other? To imagine that one can do so requires a conception
of a core self which is both transparent to the self and remains
unaffected by the dialogue. But, if subjectivity is constituted \textit{through}
the dialogue, as Diprose suggests, the question of what discourse the
subjects are speaking, and constituting themselves through, is
introduced.

For Diprose, that a dialogue is necessary at all attests to the different
status of the participants' embodied ethos, even when an ontological
equality is posited as the condition of the dialogue. In the practice of
communicative interaction, then, Diprose believes that "the constitutive
effects of dialogue are such that the difference would be subsumed
under the norms within which the dialogue takes place".\textsuperscript{90} Diprose's
observations suggest that lesbian ethics' practice of 'attending' may very
well be the mechanism through which lesbian ethical subjects are
reduced to a 'same' organized around the norms of lesbian feminist
discourse.

\textit{Lesbian Ethics} evinces a constant tension between Hoagland's claim
that there must be a common grounds, a reality consensus, for the sake
of the lesbian community's survival and the end of oppression, and her
concern to accommodate difference and not to be prescriptive. This
leads Hoagland to propose that, beyond a certain starting point, there is
no agreement about the values lesbians adopt. This starting point is
specified as the "shared experiences and common interpretations of
events in the real world".\textsuperscript{91} Besides the problematic notion of the 'shared
experiences' of women of different race/class/ethnic etc. backgrounds,

\textsuperscript{89} Diprose, \textit{op.cit.}, pp.14,24-25.

\textsuperscript{90} Ibid., p.25.

\textsuperscript{91} Hoagland, \textit{Lesbian Ethics}, p.145. See also Penelope, \textit{Call Me Lesbian}, pp.91,93,95.
the 'common interpretation' Hoagland explicitly refers to is the radical feminist perspective.

Because Hoagland's ethics rests on the normative discourse of radical and lesbian feminism, the problem of difference remains. To reiterate Foucault's position: the ethical problem is not so much one of trying to dissolve power relations in the utopia of a perfectly transparent communication (which in any event produces effects of domination), rather, it is to develop 'practices of freedom' in which relations of power can be negotiated with a minimum of domination.92

In terms of the disciplinary effects on its subjects, Diprose further suggests that an ethics based on a model of 'interactive rationality' might also function as a confessional technology.93 This is apparent in Hoagland's ethics where those lesbians privileged by their dominant race, class etc. positionings, in 'confessing' their racism through the practice of 'attending', are expected to willingly submit to disciplinary correction. Given the assumption of transparency of what constitutes racism, even after the experiences reported both by Hoagland and Frye (in which what constitutes 'racism' was manifestly contestable), it is likely that the practice of lesbian ethics would simply reproduce the disciplinary operations it sought to overcome.

**Telos**

The goal of lesbian ethics, its 'telos', is to effect, through the practices of 'attending' and 'intelligibility' motivated by a sense of 'autokoenony', a transformation of self into a being who is no longer in the habit of enacting oppressive values. It is to attain a mode of being in which lesbians do not participate in relations of domination and subordination. As necessarily effected 'outside' patriarchal conceptual structures and power relations, lesbian ethical agency suggests a correlate privileged feminist consciousness, although Hoagland does not pursue this claim. Although Hoagland's concrete examples suggests a politics of

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92 Foucault, 'The Ethic of Care for the Self as a Practice of Freedom', p.18. Here, he is specifically referring to Habermas's ideal of Interactive communication.

93 Diprose, op.cit., p.24.
engagement, lesbian ethics, in the tradition of lesbian utopics, constructs authentic lesbian political-ethical agency to be 'elsewhere' to immediate, local and specific struggles.

As formulated by Hoagland, lesbian ethics does not constitute a Foucauldian aesthetics of existence, despite positioning itself against the disciplinary moral regime of earlier radical and lesbian feminism. First, lesbian ethics does not 'refuse' modern forms of subjectivity. Rather, it evinces a slippage, characteristic of radical and lesbian feminism, between humanist essentialism (expressed in a project of self 'discovery') and an Enlightenment project of self-creation. In its Enlightenment mode, evidenced by its unproblematized notions of self-presence, transparent communication and an oppositional (rather than constitutive) relation of power to subjectivity, lesbian ethics reasserts the rational sovereign subject of modernism. Second, rather than undertaking an historical-critical enquiry into the category 'lesbian', lesbian ethics, in positing self-understanding as the condition for ethical behaviour, promotes a hermeneutics of the self. Third, the continuing problem of difference within lesbian ethics works to reinstate hierarchical relations between itself and its disavowed 'others' (constituted as 'outside' the lesbian ethical exchange), as well as between its own subjects. Race, class and other differences between subjects of lesbian ethics are again subsumed within the primacy of gender relations. All its subjects are reduced to the (lesbian feminist) 'same'. In this sense, lesbian ethics represents the normative constitution of an ethos rather than a liberation from it. Finally, and related to this previous point, lesbian ethics disavows its own power operations (and the power relations immanent in all social relations) by constituting itself as inhabiting a utopic space 'outside' (patriarchal) power relations and patriarchal conceptual structures. However, Hoagland's incipient awareness of lesbian ethics' implication in those very frameworks and structures is evident in her comment that she finds lesbian ethical values empowering within patriarchy: "I once felt that these values were meaningless in patriarchy. I am no longer sure". But, as I now move on to discuss, a Foucauldian aesthetics of existence is itself problematic in ways that are most significant for a feminist ethics and for an ethics of difference more generally.

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94 Hoagland, Lesbian Ethics, p.22.
A critique of Foucault's ethics

Foucault's formulation of an 'aesthetics of existence' is explicitly founded on an Enlightenment conception of subjectivity which, as I noted in Chapter 3, is implicitly (and sometimes explicitly) coded male. An Enlightenment conception of subjectivity is thus a highly problematic basis for the elaboration of a feminist ethics. As an Enlightenment discourse, not only does a Foucauldian ethics necessarily reintroduce the problem of sexual and other difference, but it is also necessarily implicated in the problematic binary constructions of Western philosophy. The most obvious example is the self/society binary underpinning Foucault's claim that a contemporary aesthetics of existence is to be practiced apart from social, political and economic institutions in order to avoid the operation of disciplinary power. But given the Enlightenment's complicity in the development of normalizing power, by Foucault's own admission, and as the case of lesbian ethics has demonstrated, the practice of ethics apart from, or 'outside', social structures can re-install the very sorts of normalizing power relations Foucault (and lesbian ethical subjects) sought to overcome. Of course, as the case of lesbian ethics also demonstrates, the promotion of a practice of self 'outside' social structures represents a utopic disavowal that one's embodied ethos is constituted through lived relations to others. As Diprose sees the problem:

Evoking an aesthetics of self which is practiced apart from others and outside social institutions disavows, rather than avoids, this process of production of value involving the denigration of others.  

Foucault acknowledges that Greek ethics was an ethos constructed by free men at the cost of their 'others': women and slaves. It was, in fact, those very social, political and economic structures, and free men's privileged position in them, that constituted the conditions for their ethical practice as 'autonomous' agents. For Diprose, then, to suggest that women should practice a contemporary aesthetics of existence apart from the social, political and economic structures that effect their exclusion from social exchange is to perpetuate their exclusion. Further,

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95 Diprose, op.cit., p.34.
Foucault fails to recognize the implication of that exclusion for the possibility of developing an ethics of sexual (or any) difference. For these reasons, Diprose believes that the practice of Foucauldian ethics would generate identity and value at the cost of others.\textsuperscript{96}

It is apparent that, in the case of the Greek and lesbian ethics, reciprocity, mutuality, respect and the negotiation of differences only proceeds in a relationship between equals, within a community of the 'same'. It seems that the principle of identity operative in traditional Western philosophy, and the discourses informed by it, works to promote a 'homosexual' ethics. These ethics of the 'same', as Diprose and Rosi Braidotti\textsuperscript{97} have also observed, elides sexual and other difference. To Diprose, then, a Foucauldian aesthetics of existence is not sufficient for an ethics of difference in general and sexual difference in particular.

Foucault's own contemporary ethic of permanent resistance and critique of our historical era, however, is suggestive of ways to counter the problem of difference. Recall that an historical-critical enquiry, for Foucault, entails an interrogation of how we came to be what we are which reveals the historical contingency of our identities. As Diprose suggests, a feminist ethico-political practice would necessarily interrogate the social, political and economic structures that have traditionally promoted masculinist norms at the cost and exclusion of women. Further, an ethico-politics of difference must necessarily involve an interrogation of the ways in which different selves are constituted through hierarchical social relations.\textsuperscript{98} The object of such an ethico-political practice is the transformation of those relations.

Foucault's ethic of permanent resistance is in this sense quite different from Greek and lesbian ethics of the 'same' which would necessarily break down were they to truly take account of the 'other'.\textsuperscript{99}

\textsuperscript{96} Ibid., pp.31-34. See Foucault's discussion of how Greek ethics was specifically constituted against women and femininity in The Use of Pleasure, pp.22,32-35. For further discussions on the problematics of Foucault's practice of ethics apart from social structures, see L. McNay, Foucault and Feminism, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1992, pp.77-78; Simons, op.cit., p.80.


\textsuperscript{98} Diprose, op.cit., pp.20,28,34.

\textsuperscript{99} Foucault, 'On the Genealogy of Ethics', p.346.
The fragility of Hoagland's denigration and devaluation of women living 'in the system' of heterosexuality, for example, is illustrated through her recounting Maria Lugones' experience of 'entering the world' of her mother. Cited as an example of 'proper attending', Hoagland reports that Lugones had previously assumed that her mother's identity was 'exhausted' (fully specified and accounted for) by its highly constrained construction within mainstream Argentinian culture. Through entering the world of her mother, Hoagland reports, Lugones instead came to see that her mother's life had other meanings for her and was in fact quite fulfilling. This example suggests that if 'attending' was truly successful, the denigration and devaluation of lesbian ethics' 'others' would be impossible to sustain. But, of course, Hoagland's ethical practice excludes engaging with those denigrated others, such that the possibility of a deconstructive confrontation is forestalled.

Lesbian ethics, as articulated by Hoagland, represents a reformulation of lesbian feminism. As such, it does not constitute a Foucauldian 'aesthetics of existence'. But my criticism of lesbian ethics has highlighted the problem of difference within Foucault's own ethical project, a problem I traced to his deployment of an Enlightenment conception of subjectivity. Nevertheless, Foucault's ethical project of 'becoming gay' has had a formative influence on 'Queer Theory' of the 1990s. One of the tasks of the final chapter, then, is to critically explore how Foucault's ethics have been taken up and developed by contemporary gay and lesbian theorists. In particular, I am concerned to track how the problematics of Foucauldian ethics identified in this chapter play out in Queer theory.

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100 Hoagland, Lesbian Ethics, p.243.
CHAPTER 7

THE QUEER MOMENT

The emergence of Queer

The appearance of 'Queer' in the U.S. in the late 1980s represents the most recent historical formation to emerge out of the contemporary gay and lesbian movement. Queer has constituted itself through its location at the intersection of several developments: a 'crisis of difference' as sexual minorities (for example, transsexuals and gays and lesbians of colour) contested hegemonic forms of homosexual identity and demanded inclusion in gay and lesbian communities and organizations; the political re-mobilization of gay and lesbian communities through the advent of AIDS, and the homophobia it unleashed; and the ascendancy, within the academy at least, of French post-structuralist theory, particularly that of Foucault. In this regard, when David Halperin, for instance, asked the question: "What is the single most important intellectual source of political inspiration for contemporary AIDS activists - at least for the more theoretically minded or better-outfitted among them?", the answer he received from ACT-UP activists "without the slightest hesitation or a single exception [was] Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality, Volume 1".


Critical to these new theoretical developments informed by Foucault was Gayle Rubin’s groundbreaking 1984 essay, ‘Thinking Sex’, which can be understood to constitute a founding moment for contemporary ‘queer theory’.\(^5\) As I noted in Chapter 5, Rubin’s deauthorization of lesbian feminists’ truth claims about lesbian sexuality proceeded through producing separate analytic categories of ‘sexuality’ and ‘gender’. This discursive manoeuvre also effected a redistribution of intellectual work. Theorizing sexual difference (gender) remained, for Rubin, the ambit of feminist theory while sexual practice (sexuality) was the proper domain of a yet-to-be developed radical theory and politics of sexuality. Despite her recent disclaimers (that she did not intend to draw a strict dividing line between feminism and theories of sexuality),\(^6\) Rubin’s intervention in the sex wars worked to carve out a new discursive domain which has since been inhabited by both gay and lesbian studies and queer theory.

Given its constitutive discourses and concerns, Queer promotes itself as a ‘non-identity’ or ‘anti-identitarian’ politics, displacing the essentialized ‘identity’ of identity politics where identity is taken to be the expression of an essential, ‘core’ self. Queer instead works with the post-structural insight that identities are historically contingent cultural productions. The question of determining what is a ‘true’ lesbian or an ‘authentic’ self is thereby rendered redundant. Further, because they are constituted across multiple axes of race, class, gender, ethnic, regional, national and generational relations, selves and identities are understood to be necessarily fractured and contradictory. Queer also claims to disrupt both the hetero/homo binary and the normalizing alignment of sexual organs, gender identity, sexual object choice, sexual desires and sexual practice into coherent, intelligible male/female gender categories.\(^7\) Through


\(^6\) In a 1994 interview with Judith Butler, Rubin stated that it was never her intention to establish a mutually exclusive disciplinary barrier between feminism and gay and lesbian studies: ‘I was trying to make some space for work on sexuality (and even gender) . . . I was not trying to found a field . . . As for this great methodological divide you are talking about, between feminism and gay/lesbian studies, I do not think I would accept that distribution of interests, activities, objects, and methods. I see no reason why feminism has to be limited to kinship and psychoanalysis, and I never said it should not work on sexuality. I only said it should not be seen as the privileged site for work on sexuality. I cannot imagine a gay and lesbian studies that is not interested in gender as well as sexuality and . . . there are many other sexualities to explore besides male homosexuality and lesbianism’ (‘Sexual Traffic’, differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies, Vol.6, No.3, 2+3, Summer-Fall 1994, p.88).

encouraging an open and fluid mesh of possibilities, Queer promotes the production of new, disruptive, non-essential sexual identity categories.⁸ In this sense, to Steven Angelides and Craig Bird, "Queer functions to enact the 'crisis of identity' which is identity itself".⁹

Politically, Queer constitutes itself against both earlier Marxist-inspired revolutionary politics and identity politics' strategy of asserting homosexuals' civil rights and encouraging the assimilation of homosexuals into the political-cultural mainstream.¹⁰ Queer instead asserts difference and the desirability of multiplicity, refusing normalizing universal claims and strategies. Queer politics therefore promotes:

multiple, local, intersecting struggles whose aim is less "the end of domination" or "human liberation" than the creation of social spaces that encourage the proliferation of pleasures, desires, voices, interests, modes of individuation and democratization.¹¹

At the same time, Queer is concerned not to replicate the exclusionary operations and identity policing of earlier forms of lesbian and gay politics. Queer, then, is meant as a non-hierarchalizing umbrella term representing all non-normative sexualities including, potentially, deviant forms of heterosexuality. Uniting all sexual deviance under the sign of Queer is meant to enable the possibility of strategic political alliances amongst lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transsexuals, drag queens and others in a broadly oppositional movement against cultural homogenization and dominant discourses of sexuality. Queer therefore

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⁸ E. Kosofsky Sedgwick, Tendencies, Durham N.C., Duke University Press, 1993, pp.7-8. See also Epistemology of the Closet, pp.25-26. Sedgwick lists as amongst this proliferation of identities "pushy femmes, radical faeries, fantasists, drags, clones, leatherfolk, ladies in tuxedoes, feminist women, feminist men, masturbators, bulldaggers, divers, Snap! queens, butch bottoms, storytellers, transsexuals, auntsies, wannabes, lesbian-identified men or lesbians who sleep with men". Similarly, J. Halberstam, 'F2M: The Making of Female Masculinity', in L. Doan (ed.), The Lesbian Postmodern, New York, Columbia University Press, 1994 (p.212) lists "guys with pusses, dykes with dicks, queer butches, aggressive femmes, F2Ms, lesbians who like men, daddy boys, gender queens, drag kings, pomo afro homos, bulldaggers, women who fuck boys, women who fuck like boys, dyke mommies, transsexual lesbians, male lesbians".

⁹ Angelides and Bird, op.cit., p.4.


¹¹ Seidman, op.cit., p.106.
represents to its proponents the possibility of producing new ways of thinking and living the sexual.\textsuperscript{12}

The starting point for this enquiry into Queer is suggested by Michael Warner's observation that Queer opens up new possibilities and problems whose relations to the more familiar problems of older forms of lesbian and gay politics is not always clear.\textsuperscript{13} The organizing questions for this chapter are drawn from the themes that have been the central concern of this thesis: particularly, the problematic of difference - that is, the incapacity of Western philosophical discourse to conceive difference in terms other than some form of reduction to a primary, normative term - and the 'utopic' and vanguard tendencies of contemporary sexual politics. I want to determine whether Queer lives up to its promise to dissolve these problematicss or reproduces them.

This chapter demonstrates that, in some of its modalities, Queer replicates the modernist problematics of difference and utopianism that it ostensibly overcomes. Through a symptomatic reading of Eve Kosofsky Segwick's landmark 1990 book \textit{Epistemology of the Closet}, I also show that the disarticulation of sexuality from gender demonstrates a capacity to subsume gender under sexuality, producing discourses which subsume lesbianism under (male) homosexuality.

This chapter also picks up a concern raised in Chapter 6: that Foucault's ethics is inadequate to an ethico-politics of difference. In this chapter, I show how Foucault's project of 'becoming gay' works in practice to singularize identity at the cost of its 'others'. That the problematic of difference is still manifestly present in ostensibly 'post-modern' formulations is evidenced by reports that ACT UP and Queer Nation are marred by racial and gender tensions\textsuperscript{14} and in accusations that Queer itself fails to theorize the very questions it announces.\textsuperscript{15} It is my contention, however, that the interventions in Queer by lesbians and

\textsuperscript{12} Adam, op.cit., pp.146,163; Duggan, 'Making It Perfectly Queer', pp.166,171; Smyth, op.cit., pp.28,33; Seidman, op.cit., p.133; de Lauretis, 'Queer Theory', iii-lv.

\textsuperscript{13} Warner, 'Introduction', xxviii.

\textsuperscript{14} Halperin, op.cit., p.64; Stein, op.cit., p.50; Phelan, \textit{Getting Specific}, pp.xi,153-154. Halperin (pp.64-65), Phelan (\textit{Getting Specific}, p.154) and Duggan ('Making It Perfectly Queer', p.162) also note that Queer Nation can often manifest as a militant nationalism based on an essentialized gay identity.

lesbians/women of colour work against its singularizing tendencies. I argue that it is these discourses that offer the most promise for the development of a contemporary ethico-politics of difference.

I. THE QUEER SUBJECT OF SEXUALITY

In her Introduction to *Epistemology of the Closet*, Sedgwick sets out her 'axioms' for an anti-homophobic analysis:

The study of sexuality is not coextensive with the study of gender; correspondingly, antihomophobic inquiry is not coextensive with feminist inquiry. But we can't know in advance how they will be different.\(^{16}\)

This section is concerned with showing how, when worked through the binary epistemological framework of Western philosophy, the constitution of an autonomous or semi-autonomous analytic category 'sexuality' produces (implicitly or explicitly) a gendered (male) subject. This demonstration proceeds through an analysis of the discursive moves employed by Sedgwick to create a space for gay male theorizing that avoids reduction to feminist formulations of 'gender'.\(^{17}\) However, the subsequent apparent conceptual autonomy of gay male theory and the gay male subject is shown to rest on a necessary disavowal of women (through the absence of 'gender') and even of feminism itself.

To constitute the analytic category 'sexuality' apart from a study of gender, Sedgwick invokes the familiar sex/gender distinction of early second-wave feminist theory. She characterizes the feminist understanding of the sex/gender distinction thus:

"Sex" in this sense - what I'll demarcate as "chromosomal sex" [the more or less marked dimorphisms of genital formation, hair growth... , fat distribution, hormonal function, and reproductive capacity] - is seen as the relatively minimal raw material on which then is based the social construction of gender. Gender,

\(^{16}\) Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*, p.27.

\(^{17}\) Ibid., pp.16,31.
then, is the far more elaborated, more fully and rigidly dichotomized social production and reproduction of male and female identities and behaviours - of male and female persons - in a cultural system for which "male/female" functions as a primary and perhaps model binarism affecting the structure and meaning of many, many other binarisms whose apparent connection to chromosomal sex will often be exiguous or nonexistent.\footnote{Ibid., pp.27-28.}

The sex/gender distinction is not invoked by Sedgwick in order to critique it on the grounds of its problematic modernist suppositions of subjectivity, sexuality and power (identified in Chapter 3 of this thesis). Rather, the problem Sedgwick does have with the sex/gender distinction, as it was articulated by earlier feminists, is that sexual practice (sexuality) and sexual difference are conflated in the category 'sex'. Like Rubin, then, Sedgwick is concerned to separate sexual practice from sexual difference, which she does through subdividing the original category 'sex' into 'sex' (sexual difference) and 'sexuality' (sexual practice). This division leaves Sedgwick with three categories which she is concerned to conceptually distinguish - 'sex' (sexual difference), 'sexuality' (sexual practice) and 'gender' (socially constructed male and female behaviours and identities).\footnote{Ibid., pp.28-29.}

But, because a distinction between sex and gender is only possible within a framework which posits an ontological opposition of nature and culture, Sedgwick's separation of (cultural) gender from (natural) sex, and the subsequent subdivision of 'sex', therefore yields the categories of (cultural) gender, (natural) sex and (natural) sexuality. In this carve up, culture - which Sedgwick defines as social relations, history, power - remains with the category 'gender'. However, to be amenable to political analysis and intervention, 'sexuality', like 'gender', must necessarily be inscribed as a cultural category. Indeed, 'sexuality', for Sedgwick, is a cultural category: an "array of acts, expectations, narratives, pleasures, identity-formations, and knowledges".\footnote{Ibid., p.29.} To discursively effect this 'enculturation' of the category of 'natural' sexuality constituted through
her distinction between sex and gender, Sedgwick invokes both Foucault and Freud.

Foucault's and Freud's arguments that human sexuality exceeds sexual difference and reproduction of the species provide the basis for Sedgwick's claim that:

To the extent that human sexuality has to do precisely with its excess over or potential difference from the bare choreographies of procreation, 'sexuality' might be the very opposite of what we originally referred to as (chromosomal-based) sex: it could occupy, instead, even more than 'gender', the polar position of the relational, the social/symbolic, the constructed, the variable, the representational.21

In constituting sex and sexuality oppositionally through a nature/culture distinction, Sedgwick produces a sex (sexual difference)/sexuality distinction. 'Sexuality', then, becomes the analogue of 'gender' in the sex/gender distinction. Accordingly, 'sexuality', like 'gender', is rendered amenable to cultural criticism and intervention.

Having constituted 'cultural' sexuality through its conceptual opposition to 'natural' sex (sexual difference), Sedgwick, like Rubin, proceeds to effect a division of intellectual labour where a reconstituted category of 'gender' will become the proper object of feminism and 'sexuality' the province of gay male theory. This division was foreshadowed by Sedgwick's previous conceptual separation of 'sexuality' from both 'sex' (sexual difference) and 'gender'. The move to constitute proper objects of feminist and gay male theory, however, requires the erasure of the very binary framework that has got Sedgwick to this point.

Whereas the categories of 'sex' (sexual difference) and 'gender' were held apart so as to explicitly create a space for gay male-oriented theorizing (the discursive domain of 'sexuality'), the categories 'sex' (sexual difference) and 'gender' are now collapsed together to create a proper object of feminist theory. To effect this move, Sedgwick at this

21 Ibid., p.29.
point introduces a critique of the distinction made between sex and gender, nature and culture:

"Sex" is . . . a term that extends indefinitely beyond chromosomal sex. That its history of usage often overlaps with what might, now, be properly be called "gender" is only one problem . . . Beyond [the additional problematic of] chromosomes, . . . the association of "sex", precisely through the physical body, with reproduction and with genital activity and sensation keeps offering new challenges to the conceptual clarity or even possibility of sex/gender differentiation.  

This critique of the sex/gender distinction, then, does not question the discursive production of the categories of 'sex' and 'gender' but rather questions their empirical separability.

Having destabilized the sex/gender distinction, Sedgwick goes on to assert that the primary issue in gender differentiation and gender struggle is the question of who is to have control over women's (biologically) distinctive reproductive capability. She then claims that:

Indeed, the intimacy of the association between several of the most signal forms of gender oppression and "the facts" of women's bodies and women's reproductive activity has led some radical feminists to question, more or less explicitly, the usefulness of insisting on a sex/gender distinction. For these reasons, even usages involving the "sex/gender system" within feminist theory are able to use "sex/gender" only to delineate a problematical space rather than a crisp distinction.  

Sedgwick's uncharacteristic deferral to a radical feminist critique of the sex/gender distinction nevertheless authorizes her move to reconstitute the sex/gender distinction as the category 'gender':

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22 Ibid., p.28.
23 Ibid., pp.28-29. For feminist objections to this sort of reduction of feminism to issues of reproduction see, for instance Butler, 'Against Proper Objects', pp.15-18 and Martin, 'Extraordinary Homosexuals and the Fear of Being Ordinary', p.101.
My own loose usage [of "sex/gender"]) in this book will be to
denominate that problematized space of the sex/gender
system, the whole package of physical and cultural distinctions
between woman and men, more simply under the rubric
"gender". I do this in order to reduce the likelihood of confusion
between "sex" in the sense of "the space of differences
between male and female" (what I'll be grouping under
"gender") and "sex" in the sense of sexuality.24

This new category 'gender', constituted through conflating the categories
'sex' (sexual difference) and 'gender', then, demarcates for Sedgwick the
proper domain of feminist struggle.25

Several things have happened so far in Sedgwick's move to constitute
a separate analytic domain of sexuality which is to be the object of gay
male theory. What started as a sex/gender distinction which favoured a
feminist analysis has been transformed into a sex/sexuality distinction
that favours an antihomophobic (gay male) analysis. Sex (as sexual
difference) and gender have then been collapsed into a nature-culture
amalgam which is signified by the term 'gender'. However, given that
Sedgwick's dividing practices work through a nature/culture dualism, the
new category 'gender' (through its association with reproduction) reduces
to 'nature' in a binary relation to the 'cultural' category of 'sexuality'.
Further, even if all (male and female) sexed bodies are ostensibly
included in the new category 'gender', the conventional coding of the
nature/culture binary encourages a reading of the new (and naturalized)
category of 'gender' as 'female'.26 This coding is confirmed by Sedgwick's
association of the category 'gender' with, and the proper object of
feminist theory as, the reproductive (female) body. Sedgwick's taxonomy,

24 Sedgwick, Epistemology of the Closet, p.29.
25 Sedgwick's resolution of the problematic of the sex/gender distinction runs counter to Butler's. Butler's critique of
the sex/gender distinction proposes an interrogation of the category of 'natural sex' itself. Following Foucault's
inversion of the causal links between sex and sexuality (where sexuality has traditionally been taken to be the
expression of a natural sex drive or libido, Foucault takes sex to be an effect of sexuality), Butler argues that 'sex',
understood as (prediscursive) natural sexual difference, is a discursive effect of gender. Even though she herself
does not explicitly refer to Sedgwick in Gender Trouble (both books were published in the same year), Butler's
critique of the sex/gender distinction, and its notion of prediscursive 'sex' could be turned to a radical critique of
Sedgwick's discursive operations, their effects of elision and reproduction of gender hierarchy. See Butler, Gender
Trouble, pp.6-9,12.

26 Biddy Martin has also noted this feminization of the category 'gender' in Sedgwick's formulation. See Martin,
'Sexualities without Genders and Other Queer Utopias', pp.103-104,107; Martin, 'Extraordinary Homosexuals',
pp.101-102.
then, mobilizes Western philosophy's familiar trope of 'woman' grounded in immanence (nature) by virtue of her reproductive body.

The final effect of Sedgwick's discursive production of the analytic category 'sexuality' is the 'heterosexualization' of feminism and its proper analytic object, 'gender' (reproduction). Recall that 'sexuality' is explicitly excluded from the new category of 'gender'. However, 'gender' contains a residue of sexual activity in the form of normative reproductive heterosexuality. Sedgwick obliquely suggests the heterosexual coding of her category 'gender' by claiming there is a bias towards heterosexist assumptions in the very concept of gender, and that gender-based (i.e. feminist) analyses privilege heterosexual relations.27

If the subdivision of the category 'sex', then, relegated (female, hetero-sexed) bodies to the new category 'gender', what remains is a category of (homo)'sexuality' without sexually differentiated bodies - a condition that Biddy Martin terms 'sexualities without genders'.28 But, if 'gender' is coded female, might not the category of an engendered (homo)'sexuality' be implicitly coded male? As Judith Butler argues:

If gender is said to belong to feminism, and sexuality in the hands of lesbian and gay studies is conceived as liberated from gender, then the sexuality that is "liberated" from feminism will be one which suspends the reference to masculine and feminine, reinforcing the refusal to mark that difference, which is the conventional way in which the masculine has achieved the status of the "sex" which is one.29

And if, as Martin claims,30 Queer's 'antifoundationalism' is constructed against the purported 'foundationalism' of 'gender' and feminism in an constructionist/essentialist binary relation, might not (male homo-) sexuality be understood as the new privileged site of sexual politics in the tradition of a transcendent utopics? If so, the new sexual vanguard could very well be construed as comprising gay males.

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27 Sedgwick, Epistemology of the Closet, p.31.
28 Martin, 'Sexualities Without Genders' (title).
29 Butler, 'Against Proper Objects', p.20. Martin, 'Sexualities without Genders' (p.107) and 'Extraordinary Homosexuals' (p.102) agrees.
30 Martin, 'Sexualities Without Genders' p.104.
The newest sexual vanguard

The dichotomy heterosexual/homosexual, as it has emerged through the last century of Western discourse, would seem to lend itself peculiarly neatly to a set of analytic moves learned from this deconstructive moment in feminist theory. In fact, the dichotomy heterosexual/homosexual fits the deconstructive template much more neatly than male/female itself does, and hence, importantly differently [sic]. The most dramatic difference between gender and sexual orientation - that virtually all people are publicly and unalterably assigned to one or the other gender, and from birth - seems if anything to mean that it is, rather, sexual orientation, with its far greater potential for rearrangement, ambiguity, and representational doubleness, that would offer the aper deconstructive object. An essentialism of object-choice is far less easy to maintain, far more visibly incoherent, more visibly stressed and challenged at every point in the culture than any essentialism of gender.31

Sedgwick adds that she doesn't mean by this statement to privilege sexuality, ontologically or epistemologically. However, the constitution of 'sexuality' as mobile and radically alterable in opposition to the fixed and mired status of 'gender' has several effects. The first is an incipient claim to vanguardism of the subjects of the category 'sexuality' - that is, gay men. The second is the corollary of the first: that to be transgressive subjects of sexuality, lesbians must escape the miring constraints of 'gender'. And, because 'gender' is implicitly coded 'female', lesbian transgression must necessarily involve disavowing the female body in order to take up a 'masculine' position of radical transgression and transcendent freedom.

Martin argues, in relation both to Sedgwick and Queer generally, that the Queer transgressive 'escape' from gender, while worked through the familiar Enlightenment trope of disembodiment, always takes the form of gender crossings. Sedgwick's move, for Martin, therefore must involve a

31 Sedgwick, Epistemology of the Closet, p.34. Needless to say, the contemporary critique of the idea of gender's radical alterability can be applied to Sedgwick's similar characterization of 'sexuality' here. Sedgwick herself (pp.41-42) even critiques the radical alterability of gender proposed by the sex/gender distinction. See Butler, 'Against Proper Objects', p.23; J. Butler, Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex", New York and London, Routledge, 1995, passim; Martin 'Extraordinary Homoexuas', p.100.
disavowal of ‘the feminine’ - specifically in this case, the lesbian ‘femme’. This implicit (male) gendered coding of the Queer subject underpins Martin’s claim that the ‘butch’ becomes Queer’s privileged lesbian figure.\textsuperscript{32}

Further, Martin argues that lesbian desire is necessarily figured as ‘phallic’ in Queer theory. This is because the identification of lesbians with gay men along the line of their shared (homo)sexuality effects a differentiation between women in terms of hetero- and homo- sexual. In this differentiation, heterosexual women (subjects of the category ‘gender’) are characterized as maternal and asexual, while lesbians are represented as sexually virile (phallic).\textsuperscript{33} This striking parallel with the ‘masculinization’ required of women in order to attain the status of universal ‘human’ (discussed in Chapter 3) reveals the presence of modernist conceptions of (masculine) subjectivity within ostensibly post-modern formulations.

Sedgwick acknowledges the problematic and contradictory positioning of lesbians which arises from the disarticulation of gender and sexuality. She clearly states that the conceptual separation of gender and sexuality only makes possible a gay male centred analysis of sexuality:

I hope they [readers] are able to see it [deferring the moment of accountability between feminist and gay male terms of analysis] as a genuine deferral, in the interests of making space for a gay-male oriented analysis that would have its own claims to make for an illuminating centrality, rather than as a refusal.\textsuperscript{34}

While Sedgwick concedes that it is likely that lesbian specificity would be subsumed by gay male discourse, this does not necessarily mean that a male centred analysis of the homo/hetero binary will have no lesbian


\textsuperscript{33} Martin, ‘Extraordinary Homosexuals’, pp.100-101. Again, the virile (phallic) lesbian can only be figured through the ‘butch’, a representation which relies precisely on traditional gender codings.

\textsuperscript{34} Sedgwick, Epistemology of the Closet, p.16. See also p.29. Yet, it is apparent that Sedgwick is also engaged in a gay and lesbian anti-homophobic enquiry more generally (pp.32-33).
relevance or interest. But, ultimately, developing lesbian theory is an altogether different project for Sedgwick:

It seems inevitable to me that the work of defining the circumferential boundaries, vis-à-vis lesbian experience and identity, of any gay male-centred theoretical articulation can be done only from the point of view of an alternative, feminocentric theoretical space, not from the heart of the male-centred project itself.\textsuperscript{35}

At the same time, however, Sedgwick insists that the analytic connection between gender and sexuality must be maintained. She hypothesizes with Rubin:

that the question of gender and the question of sexuality, inextricable from one another though they are in that each can be expressed only in the terms of the other, are nonetheless not the same question, that in twentieth-century Western culture gender and sexuality represent two analytic axes that may productively be imagined as distinct from one another as, say, gender and class, or class and race. Distinct, that is to say, no more than minimally, but nonetheless usefully.\textsuperscript{36}

Finally, Sedgwick concedes that "every issue of gender would necessarily be embodied through the specificity of a particular sexuality, and vice versa".\textsuperscript{37} This ambivalent relationship between gender and sexuality - as fully autonomous or imbricated with each other - constitutes a considerable site of tension in Sedgwick's project.

The tension produced by deferring the moment of accountability between gender and sexuality, feminism and gay male theory, becomes overwhelming at the very site of her study: male homosexuality. While Sedgwick claims that not all determinations of sexuality are definitionally entwined with gender (as in the case of intergenerational sex or childhood masturbation), the very determination she is working with (the

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., p.39.
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., p.30.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., p.31.
homo/heterosexual binary) is, as she admits, so intertwined with the concept of gender that without it there would be no concept of homo- or heterosexuality. At the very least this suggests that, in the case of an analysis which centres on the homo/hetero binary, gender and sexuality cannot be analytically separated, that gender cannot be 'disappeared'. That Sedgwick appears to do so is precisely because her object of study and theorizing is confined to the unmarked gender - the male homosexual. My point here is that, even while the nexus formed in the nineteenth century between sexuality and gender can be deconstructed, the ongoing mutually constitutive effects of that nexus cannot be disavowed.

The question could be therefore be asked: does it matter if the category 'sexuality', as constituted by Sedgwick, promotes a male subject when the category is meant precisely to open a space for gay male theorizing? My answer is 'yes' on several counts. First, Sedgwick's discourse rests on the philosophical tradition which both she and Queer generally ostensibly seek to overcome: the 'violence' done to 'others' in a non-reflexive practice of self constitution. Of most significance for the position of lesbians in Queer theory is that tradition's disavowal of women and the feminine. Second, Sedgwick's discourse produces its own blind spots which threaten its critical effectiveness, as in the case of 'homosexuality' above. Sedgwick notes the 'sudden, radical condensation of sexual categories into hetero- and homo- sexuality' in the nineteenth century, but she offers no explanation for this. The historical research surveyed in Chapter 1, however, leaves no doubt that the creation of the modern homosexual in the nineteenth century was deeply implicated in a crisis in gender relations. Finally, it is apparent that the problem of implicit (male) gender specificity of Sedgwick's

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38 Ibid., p.31.
39 Indeed, Lois McNay argues: 'Because the category of the 'naturally sexed body' only makes sense in terms of a binary discourse on sex, in which men and women exhaust the possibilities of sex and relate to each other as complementary opposites, the category of sex is always subsumed under a discourse of heterosexuality' (Foucault and Feminism, p.19). Similarly, Butler argues: "The institution of a compulsory and naturalized heterosexuality requires and regulates gender as a binary relation in which the masculine term is differentiated from the feminine term, and this differentiation is accomplished through the practices of heterosexual desire" (Gender Trouble, pp.22-23).
40 Sedgwick, Epistemology of the Closet, pp.9,31. Given my discussion in Chapter 1, it is obvious that, at least in the case of female homosexuality, the consolidation of sexual categories into two stable and manageable forms (homo- and hetero- sexuality), was located within a more general crisis in the social relations between the sexes. That is, a concurrent gender analysis is called for (as is its class specificities). In this regard, Butler notes that the analytic category 'sexuality' is no more effective than 'gender' in theorizing transgendered sexualities (Against Proper Objects, p.11).
category 'sexuality' is elided in its general deployment within Queer. That is, Sedgwick's formulations have tended to be taken by many commentators as a paradigm for contemporary gay and lesbian studies.\footnote{Because it places sexuality at the centre of analysis, *Epistemology of the Closet* is routinely invoked as a, if not the, central text of contemporary lesbian, gay and Queer theory, seemingly forgetting its explicit (male) gender specificity. See, for example, Warner, *Introduction*, vi-vr; Selman, op.cit., p.131; Halperin, op.cit., pp.34-38; Duggan, *Making It Perfectly Queer*, pp.167-168; Angelides and Bird, op.cit., pp.3-4.}

Despite Sedgwick's disclaimers to the contrary, there is a tendency for the category 'sexuality' to take up a privileged position in contemporary sexual politics. As a new master category, 'sexuality' threatens to reproduce in Queer theory the problems generated in feminism by the master category 'gender'. Where radical feminism subsumed sexuality (and race and class) under gender, Queer theory risks subsuming gender (and race and class) under sexuality. Butler, for instance, has registered a concern about the claim, made by the Editors in the Introduction to *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, that "lesbian/gay studies does for sex and sexuality approximately what women's studies does for gender".\footnote{Cited in Butler, *Against Proper Objects*, p.1.} Given my discussion so far, I therefore propose to place the category 'sexuality' under permanent suspicion.

A final concern raised by the disarticulation of gender and sexuality found in Queer theory is the potentially 'anti-feminist' move of cleaving across the category 'woman' in order to reorganize identification and political alignments along lines of sexuality. Queer theory demonstrates a tendency to define itself against feminism through its repudiation of 'gender' (the difference between gay men and lesbians). As Butler has observed, some sectors of the queer movement have demonstrated their hostility towards feminism, with the effect of breaking coalitions between them.\footnote{Ibid., pp.5,20-21.}

In this reordering of political alignments, lesbians again are confronted with the either/or choice they faced at the outset of second-wave feminism and gay liberation: whether to politically locate themselves within the women's liberation movement or the gay liberation movement. The cleavage along either line (of sexuality in Queer, or
gender in feminism) is problematic for lesbian feminists in a way not experienced by gay men or heterosexual feminists. As my discussion throughout this thesis has highlighted, this 'liminal' positioning of lesbian identity somewhere in between feminist and Queer (or homosexual) identification, also renders lesbian identity contestable and unstable. It is the recognition of the 'impossibility' of a singular, unitary identity that characterizes critical interventions by lesbians and woman of colour in contemporary Queer theory.

My analysis of Sedgwick's 'Axioms' has led to an argument that the articulation of gender and sexuality, forged in nineteenth century Western sexology, cannot be simply disavowed. To do so, even if in order to avoid a reduction of sexuality to gender, evinces a 'gender blindness' which has traditionally signified male-as-norm. The problem of difference can therefore still operate within ostensibly 'post-modern' discourses through an unproblemazted recourse to modernist epistemological formulations, in Sedgwick's case, the conceptual distinction made between nature and culture, 'sex' and 'gender'. In the next section, I further explore this ongoing problem of difference through another popular theme in contemporary gay/lesbian/queer theory - that of 'becoming gay'.

II. BECOMING GAY/BECOMING LESBIAN

In Chapter 6, Foucault's ethical project was criticized on the grounds that it did not constitute an ethic of difference even as it established itself against normalizing sexual regimes and the hierarchical ordering and necessary denigration of 'others' these entailed. In this section, I want to test Diprose's assertion, noted in Chapter 6, that the practice of Foucauldian ethics would generate identity and value for its subjects at the cost of its 'others'. The discussion proceeds through an exploration of how Foucault's ethical project of 'becoming gay' has been taken up by several contemporary gay and lesbian theorists, most particularly Mark Blasius, David Halperin and Shane Phelan. I intend to show that 'becoming gay' most often works against the queer impulse to recognize and work with all the differences within and between selves. Further, I show that the consolidation and valorization of sexual identity effected
through 'becoming gay' produces a tension with Queer's promotion of a proliferation of sexual identities. I also show how the universalizing gestures of 'becoming gay' and particularly the subsumption of lesbian specificity and other differences within 'the same' ('gay' identity) are resisted in lesbians' work. In this way, I argue, contemporary lesbian theorists work against a tendency within Queer to replicate the familiar problems of older forms of gay and lesbian politics.

**Becoming gay**

Following Queer's imperative, for Blasius, Halperin and Phelan, gay and lesbian identities are not given, but are rather "works in progress".\(^{44}\) Homosexuality is taken to be "an identity without essence, not a given condition but a horizon of possibility, an opportunity for self-transformation, a queer potential".\(^{45}\) Hence the possibility of a queer politics which, for Halperin, is

defined not by the struggle to liberate a common, repressed, preexisting nature but by an ongoing process of self-constitution and self-transformation - a queer politics anchored in the perilous and shifting sands of non-identity, positionality, discursive reversibility and collective self-invention.\(^{46}\)

Unlike Hoagland's utopian lesbian ethics (which she figures as 'outside' of patriarchy), becoming gay/becoming lesbian locates itself as a resistive and transformative site *within* the apparatus of sexuality. As a project which promotes sexual identity categories, it understands its implication in the 'deployment of sexuality' as the necessary condition for sexual politics. Accordingly, the starting point for the ethico-political project of becoming gay or lesbian is 'coming out'. For Blasius, coming out is a "process of becoming, a lifelong learning of how to become (and of inventing the meaning of being) a lesbian or gay man in this historical moment".\(^{47}\) Becoming gay or lesbian is therefore itself conditional on the

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\(^{44}\) Phelan, *Getting Specific*, p.41.

\(^{45}\) Halperin, op.cit., p.79.

\(^{46}\) Ibid., p.122.

\(^{47}\) Blasius, op.cit., pp.118-119.
existence of a community in which one can live one's life as gay or lesbian. Through 'coming out', as Blasius writes

one enters into a specific kind of discourse and practices about what it means to be lesbian or gay, which the existence of community has made possible and through which one voluntarily forms oneself as an ethical subject in relation to the values of that community. 48

According to Blasius, following Foucault, becoming lesbian or gay is an ethico-political choice to stylize one's existence toward the elaboration of lesbian or gay selfhood rather than discipline oneself and others in accordance with a moral code. From these practices of self new relational forms will emerge which critique and displace compulsory heterosexuality. It is on this basis that Blasius believes that 'becoming gay' can transform the technology of sexuality itself. 49 In this sense, as both an 'ethical substance' (itself to be worked over) and a technology for self-transformation and inventing new modes of collective life through erotic relations with others, homosexuality to Blasius is more an 'ethos' than a sexual preference. 50

Similarly, for Halperin, becoming gay or lesbian is a project of creating new modalities of subjective agency and new styles of personal life that may enable one to resist or even escape one's social determinants. 'Becoming' gay or lesbian involves for Halperin a Foucauldian self-overcoming, of becoming other than what one is. 51 Further, homosexuality to Halperin constitutes a 'queer' or 'eccentric' positionality in relation to sexual norms. Homosexuality is thus itself a condition of knowledge, a potentially privileged site for the analysis and criticism of homophobic cultural discourse. 52 From this eccentric positionality occupied by the queer subject it may become possible

48 Ibid., p.204.
51 Halperin, op.cit., p.76.
52 Ibid., pp.60-61. Here Halperin explicitly draws on Teresa de Lauretis' understanding of 'eccentric' subjectivity (see Footnote 70).
to envision a variety of possibilities for reordering the relations among sexual behaviours, erotic identities, constructions of gender, forms of knowledge, regimes of enunciation, logics of representation, modes of self-constitution, and practices of community - for restructuring, that is, the relations among power, truth, and desire.\textsuperscript{53}

For Halperin, then, queer identities open a social space for constructing different identities, elaborating various types of relationships and developing new cultural forms which radically resist and subvert heteronormativity.\textsuperscript{54}

It is apparent from the above discussion that 'Queer' can be invoked to refer to an exclusively homosexual (gay and lesbian) 'post-structural' political practice. 'Becoming gay' by definition works against the queer impulse toward multiplicity, fluidity and difference, instead consolidating the category 'homosexual' and reinstalling the homo/hetero binary. This condensation of sexualities into a homo/hetero binary under the guise of Queer requires explanation. There seem to be at least two major elements at work in this condensation: political pragmaticism and the problem of difference operative within Foucault's ethical project.

Halperin's insistence on the centrality of homosexuality to Queer derives from what he sees as the problematic political effects of Queer's indeterminacy. For him, Queer identity's greatest strength lies in its acquiring meaning from its opposition to the norm. Queer is \textit{whatever} is at any time at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant: "\textit{There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers}" (his emphasis).\textsuperscript{55} Queerness therefore represents a resistant relation rather than an oppositional substance. But Queer's lack of specificity is, to Halperin, also its greatest weakness. Because homosexuality is unspecified, Queer, to him, obscures the fact of gay and lesbian oppression.

In an assertion which seems in the one move to undercut many of Queer's maxims, and belie the phenomenon of political lesbianism and

\textsuperscript{53} ibid., p.62.
\textsuperscript{54} ibid., p.67.
\textsuperscript{55} ibid., p.62.
Califia's sexual experiences (reported in Chapter 5), Halperin claims that "one can't become homosexual, strictly speaking: either one is or one isn't". Halperin here seems to be taking issue with the appropriation of queer identity by "those who do not experience the unique disabilities and forms of social disqualification from which lesbian and gay men routinely suffer in virtue of our sexuality". Amongst those who make claims to radical chic he includes women who identify as lesbians but who sleep with men and, it seems, bisexuals. Halperin demands that 'wannabe' sexual outlaws earn their sexually transgressive identities by putting their bodies on the line, that is, by engaging in homosexual practice.

Halperin's critique of Queer suggests that, as long as there exists an oppositional hierarchy of hetero- and homo- sexuality which reproduces the pathologized category of homosexuality and authorizes oppressive practices towards homosexuals, there will be a need to resist as homosexuals. A successful challenge to heterosexual domination would, for Blasius and Halperin, see 'gay' and 'lesbian' attaining the status of legitimate subject positions, a sign of which would be gays and lesbians visibly occupying positions of sociocultural power and authority. For these writers, for politically pragmatic reasons, contemporary sexual politics consists of the affirmation of gay and lesbian identity rather than a dismantling or confounding proliferation of sexual categories.

For Halperin and Blasius, resistance to heterosexual domination in its most pragmatic, everyday forms demands the consolidation of gay and lesbian communities, particularly in the face of New Right moves against homosexuals in the context of the AIDS crisis. Over the past decade in the U.S., there have been successful campaigns to re-criminalize homosexual behaviour and remove anti-discrimination provisions from city and state statutes. In this political climate, Blasius believes there is

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56 Ibid., p.79.
57 Ibid., p.65.
58 Blasius, op.cit., p.183; Halperin, op.cit., p.57. Phelan, Getting Specific, p.150 also notes this tension between the impulse to radically deconstruct sexual categories and political pragmatism in the face of ongoing oppression of sexual minorities.
The second element in stabilizing homosexual (specifically gay) identity derives, I believe, from an evasion of difference, a consciousness which is possible for white, middle-class, gay men located in a community of similar others. Sexual identity becomes the exclusive, privileged ethico-political site for those who are otherwise unmarked by gender, race, class and other difference. As Blasius notes, gay men's and lesbians' focus on erotics as the ethical substance of an ethico-political project arises from the fact that their homosexuality is the part of themselves that they have not been able to take for granted and to which they therefore have had to pay most attention. 61 This is a problematic statement in the case of lesbians, who are marked also by their gender, though, from Minnie Bruce Pratt's and Shane Phelan's accounts, it is apparent that race and class privilege can offset sexism to some degree. For Pratt and Phelan, it was their lesbianism that marked them as different. 62

Because their deviation from the norm consists of their homosexuality, the project of 'becoming gay' is, I believe, most easily taken up by a particular group of (white, middle class) gay men. Thus, a particular type of (white, male, middle-class) 'gay' identity tends to be again stabilized and universalized. Even as racism in the gay community is noted as something to be concerned about, racial and other differences are not discussed in the context of 'becoming gay.' 63 Blasius,

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60 Blasius, op.cit., p.135. *Relational rights* refers to new forms of relationships that deserve social recognition and legal legitimation. See his Chapter 4 for a full discussion of this concept.

61 Ibid., pp.6, 204. Phelan, Getting Specific, p.142 makes a similar point.


for example, can speak of a common lesbian and gay community and culture, of a distinctive gay and lesbian subjectivity and a shared gay and lesbian perspective without regard to sexual or other difference.64

Besides its elision of sexual, racial, ethnic and class differences, the project of becoming gay works to re-fix desire into a hetero/homo binary. This has several implications for Queer. First, it constitutes homosexuality as the privileged point of resistance to the heterosexual norm, and valorizes gay and lesbian identity at the cost of its 'others' - for example, bisexuals - who, in a move reminiscent of lesbian feminism, tend to be figured as sexual dilettantes. This hierarchical ordering of identities within Queer, against its own founding principles, has in turn generated its own resistances and contestations.65 Secondly, refixing desire into homo- and hetero- sexual categories reintroduces a tension between the simultaneous impulses to deconstruct and consolidate identity - a tension which has been a characteristic feature of sexual politics since the 1960s. This ongoing tension could very well mark a division between queer and gay/lesbian studies along the lines of multiple fluid and shifting identities versus a coherent, if historically changing, category of homosexuality. It seems, then, that sexual fluidity is still the occasion for disruption and anxiety even within a 'post-modern' theory and politics of sexuality.

My discussion of 'becoming gay', as articulated by Halperin and Blasius, confirms Diprose's claim that the practice of a Foucauldian ethics is likely to generate identity and value at the cost of its 'others'. The practice of becoming gay does not interrogate the historical construction of homosexual identities. More importantly (for an ethico-politics of difference), 'becoming gay' does not interrogate the processes by which those identities were and continue to be constructed at the cost of differently gendered/raced/classed/sexualized 'others'. Not to undertake such a critical interrogation reproduces, rather than contests and transforms, relations of hierarchical ordering of gender, race, class

64 Blasius, op.cit., pp.6,201,203.

65 See, for example, Steven Angelides' response to Elizabeth Grosz's characterization of bisexuals as 'wanting to have their cake and eat it too' in her paper 'Experimental Desire. Rethinking Queer Subjectivity', p.154. Note that this comment was dropped in the paper's reprinting in a compilation of Grosz's essays, Space, Time and Perversion. The Politics of Bodies, St. Leonards N.S.W., Allen and Unwin, 1995. S. Angelides, 'Rethinking the Political: Poststructuralism and the Economy of (Hetero)Sexuality', Critical InQueeries, Vol.1, No.1, September 1995, pp.27-46. See also Daumer, op.cit., pp.91-105.
and other difference amongst queer subjects. In the next section, I show how Foucault’s project of becoming gay has been taken up and simultaneously problematized by Shane Phelan in ways that suggest fruitful lines of development of an ethico-politics of difference.

**Becoming lesbian?**

Shane Phelan’s account of ‘becoming lesbian’ begins with a ‘coming out’ story which works to problematize Halperin’s and Blasius’ taken-for-grantedness of homosexual identity. Phelan’s account questions her experience of coming out as a lesbian in a way that illuminates how ‘coming out’ effects the inscription of self into a totalizing sexual identity that purports to represent the ‘truth’ of the self. At the time of her coming out, Phelan took the ‘discovery’ of her lesbianism to be the moment of revelation of her true self, a truth that had been symptomatically present in childhood tomboy behaviours, sexual games with pubescent girlfriends and non-conformity to standards of femininity. In this understanding of coming out, which she held at the time, her sexual relations with men over a long period of time and her years of married life did not count as ‘authentic’ experiences.

Phelan now rejects this story of self-discovery through coming out as a lesbian because of its implication in nineteenth century notions of homosexuality as gender inversion. At the time of her coming out, her lesbianism provided for Phelan a totalizing account of her rebellion against a variety of social norms. The consciousness of her difference and the ‘different consciousness’ she was aware of since childhood she now sees in retrospect to have been the effect of a whole network of identity and power relations.\(^66\)

If lesbianism no longer for Phelan provides a totalizing explanation for her difference, what is its political significance now in her life? Phelan firstly refuses to conflate lesbianism and feminism on the grounds that this conflation replicates the (heterosexual) ‘woman’/‘lesbian’ opposition that has worked against the alliance of heterosexual and lesbian feminists. Lesbianism nevertheless for Phelan does provide a critical site

\(^{66}\) Phelan, *Getting Specific*, pp.52-53.
of gender deconstruction through exposing the continuing discursive processes which work to produce the oppositional categories 'man'/'woman' through the pathologization of homosexuality:

Lesbianism provides a critical space against heteropatriarchy most keenly insofar as lesbians turn from self-explanation to analysis and demystification of the heterosexual order(s) that define "woman" and "man" and make lesbians so scandalous. 67

However, wary of past claims to vanguardism produced by such conceptions of lesbianism, Phelan does not claim that this critical vantage point exists outside networks of power and therefore constitutes a privileged epistemology. Instead, lesbianism is rather a location within patriarchal social relations from where identities, specific consciousness's and new modes of living and being can be generated. For Phelan, lesbian remains a political identification: "Becoming lesbian is indeed a process of resistance to patriarchal heterosexuality. It is not the discovery or revelation of one's resistance but is the resistance itself." 68

What is interesting in Phelan's account, compared with Blasius' and Halperin's, is the evidence of her shifting sexual desires and changing sexual identifications, and the refusal to totally disarticulate sexuality from gender. This might constitute one of the differences between contemporary gay and lesbian theorists. But, sensitive to the criticisms of feminism articulated by women of colour, Phelan works with the concept of multiple, interlocking systems of power and social relations through which individuals are differentially constituted. Phelan therefore recognizes the 'impossibility' of a singular, unified identity, a recognition which again seems most pronounced in contemporary lesbian theory. 69

Drawing on the writings of lesbians of colour, particularly Gloria Anzaldúa's concept of 'mestiza' consciousness, Phelan attempts to develop for lesbians a model of consciousness that arises from living within multiple cultures. The shifting territories and oppressions of race,

67 ibid., pp.53-54.
68 ibid., p.52. See also pp.10-11,41,52-54,56,151.
69 ibid., pp.8-9,12.
gender, sexuality, ethnicity are most acutely experienced by those, like women of colour and lesbians, who do not fully belong in any one analytic category because of their multiple differences from (race, gender, class, ethnic, sexual) norms. This 'liminal' experience can give rise to a consciousness with a heightened appreciation of ambiguity and multiplicity, and the complexity of political life. Because of their inability/refusal to fit within existing categories, such individuals tend to refuse either/or alliances (or at least have highly problematic experiences if they make such a choice). That many individuals to not easily 'fit' into available categories also exposes the historical rather than ontological nature of all categories and identities. Further, the 'mestiza' experience suggests to Phelan that the apparently monolithic and static categories of sex, race, gender, ethnicity and sexuality are themselves always-already inflected through other social relations (for example, the assumed whiteness of lesbian and gay communities, the assumed heterosexuality of ethnic cultures) and hence have exclusive effects. This consciousness of constant displacement, then, enacts a deferral of identity which is the condition for a radical interrogation of identity itself.70

Phelan's ethico-politics of difference consists of a deconstructive analysis of one's own located specificity in various relations of power. Most importantly, this practice must involve the interrogation of one's 'unmarked' identities: whiteness, maleness, middle-classness, and so on. It is through such an interrogation that the hegemonic effects of their unmarkedness can be made manifest. And while her commitment to the self's multiple constitutive identifications does not preclude a specific lesbian culture-building, unlike Blasius (who tends to presume a monolithic 'gay' culture), Phelan recognizes that this activity will produce multiple lesbian cultures. Against traditional lesbian feminist goals, Phelan does not imagine a utopic future of harmonious sameness, but rather accepts ongoing agonistic relations of difference where conflicts are not so much resolved as they are democratically negotiated. Through such negotiation and acknowledgment of difference, however,

70 Ibid., pp.xvi, 16.30,57,66-67,72. Teresa de Lauretis's notion of 'eccentric subjectivity' is very similar to 'mestiza consciousness' in that it is "a position attained through practices of political and personal displacement across boundaries between social sexual identities and communities, between bodies and discourses" (T. de Lauretis, "Eccentric Subjects: Feminist Theory and Historical Consciousness", Feminist Studies 16, No.1, Spring 1990, p.145). Eccentric subjectivity born from not belonging also constitutes for de Lauretis an eccentric point of view, a position of unusual knowing (pp.138-139). Similar to these concepts is Rosi Braidotti's notion of 'nomadic' subjectivity and consciousness which, shifting between different and changing terrains of identity, resists tidy and unity ('Introduction: By Way of Nomadism', in Nomadic Subjects, pp.1-39).
commonalities and affinities may emerge that enable the possibility of contingent coalitions with a view to contesting and transforming a specific, common sociopolitical terrain.  

Phelan’s discussion highlights the tension between a Foucauldian ethical project of 'becoming gay', with its valorization of sexual identity, and an ethico-politics of difference, with its commitment to identity as multiply constituted across a variety of axes. Phelan’s marking as 'different' from the norm across at least two vectors (female gender and homosexuality) produces a consciousness that insists on recognizing the difference between and within subjects. It is a recognition that works against the totalizing, reductive tendencies of Foucault’s ethics as elaborated through ‘becoming gay’. The final section of this chapter explores the necessary theoretical direction that work such as Phelan’s points to.

III. THINKING THROUGH DIFFERENCE

Queer, as I have argued in this chapter, demonstrates a tendency to perpetuate the problematics that it ostensibly overcomes. The conceptual separation of sexuality and gender can lead to the familiar subsumption of lesbianism within the category of (male) homosexuality. Lesbian writers are therefore sceptical about the inclusionary claims of contemporary queer and gay/lesbian theory. As Teresa de Lauretis observes: "differences are implied in it [the term 'gay and lesbian'] but then simply taken for granted or even covered over by the word 'and".  

But, as I have also shown, lesbians' contributions to and interventions in contemporary queer theory resist its tendency to become a monologue of the gay male by insisting, at a minimum, on the recognition of sexual difference. This insistence derives from a longstanding feminist concern to disrupt the trope of disembodied universalism by which the implicit masculinity of the subject (and therefore the partiality) of Western philosophical discourse is erased. Rendering visible the corporeality of

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71 Phelan, Getting Specific, pp.xx,8-9,11-13,30,67-68,72-73,140,145,147,149.

speaking subjects exposes their limiting situatedness not only in asymmetric relations of gender but also in racial, class, geopolitical and national relations.\textsuperscript{73}

Elizabeth Grosz, for example, and for reasons different from Halperin's, wants to specify Queer bodies and desires in order to highlight lesbianism's very different history from male homosexuality. She wants to explore the implications of this different history for sexological theorizing on, and the legal codification, visibility and representation of, lesbians.\textsuperscript{74} A specific enquiry of the type Grosz envisages would necessarily reveal that lesbians' differentiated history from male homosexuality arises precisely out of gender relations and the complex organization of male and female identities.\textsuperscript{75}

Because the question of gender can therefore not be avoided in specifying the historical formation and subsequent development of contemporary lesbianism (being implicated in the ongoing reconstruction of normative oppositional categories of 'man' and 'woman', outlined in Chapter 1), Western lesbianism cannot help but be implicated in feminism. Lesbian politics has therefore not only been historically concerned to validate a culturally demonized form of sexual desire and practice but lesbianism has also been and continues to be a political identity in relation to feminist struggles. Even if Queer represents an attempt to break the link forged by nineteenth century sexology between gender and sexuality (because of the problematic effects of their conflation in contemporary sexual politics), it is precisely because lesbianism has cultural currency as a category of gender non-conformity that it continues to provide a site of contestation of the asymmetrical relations of gender. Further, there would be few contemporary lesbian 'queers' who would disavow feminism, even if they did not identify as feminists. 'Lesbian' is therefore a more historically complex category than 'gay', as this thesis has attempted to show.

\textsuperscript{73} Grosz, \textit{Volatile Bodies}, pp.ix,188. The writings of Grosz, Gatens and Diprose exemplify this sort of feminist work.

\textsuperscript{74} Grosz, 'Experimental Desire', pp.145-146 (Copjec version).

\textsuperscript{75} Weeks, \textit{Sexuality and Its Discontents}, p.203.
The feminist corrective to queer theory's singularizing tendencies does not stop at recognizing sexual difference. Attentive to the by-now longstanding critiques of white Western feminism and gay politics by lesbians/women/gay men of colour, Phelan's discussion of 'becoming lesbian' highlighted the necessity to consider the multiple differences within as well as between contemporary sexual subjects. Queer's own conception of subjectivity as shifting and multiply organized across variable axes of difference raises a series of questions that cannot be ignored in contemporary theorizing on sexuality. For de Lauretis, these are:

questions that have as yet been barely broached, such as the respective and/or common grounding of current discourses and practices of homo-sexualities in relation to gender and to race, with their attendant differences of class or ethnic culture, generational, geographical, and socio-political location. We would, I hoped, be willing to examine, make explicit, compare, or confront the respective histories, assumptions, and conceptual frameworks that have characterized the self-representations of North American lesbians and gay men, of colour and white, up to now; from there, we could then go on to recast or reinvent the terms of our sexualities, to construct another discursive horizon, another way of thinking the sexual.  

But thinking through these differences generates its own challenges. The 'additive' model of multiply oppressed identities, noted in Chapter 6, has proven itself to be inadequate to the task of theorizing queer subjectivities. Besides producing a moralistic 'hierarchy of oppression', the various axes of power and identification are conceived, on the 'additive' model, as parallel or discrete. For Diana Fuss, this atomistic metaphor of identity locates difference in the spaces between individuals' identifications rather than within them. Hence, to her, the 'additive' model does not effectively challenge the traditional understanding of identity as unity. In a similar vein, Judith Butler argues that the theoretical separation of the analytic terms race, gender, sexuality and so on is itself

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76 de Lauretis, 'Queer Theory', ill-v.
77 Fuss, Essentially Speaking, p.103.
based on exclusionary operations that attribute to them a false uniformity and coherence.\textsuperscript{78} My analysis of Sedgwick's construction of the category 'sexuality' highlights this problematic.

For these writers, then, the challenge is to understand how multiple axes of social differentiation are constantly intersecting and mutually implicated, and in such a way that asymmetrical relations are (re)produced. For Butler, what has to be thought through are "the ways in which these vectors of power require and deploy each other for the purpose of their own articulation".\textsuperscript{79} Or, as de Lauretis writes:

What cannot be elided in a politically responsible theory of sexuality, of gender, or of culture is the critical value of that "also", which is neither simply additive nor exclusive, but signals the nexus, the mode of operation of interlocking systems of gender, sexual, radical, class and other, more local categories of social stratification.\textsuperscript{80}

Against the move to disarticulate gender, sexuality and other relations, then, these apparently separable and autonomous categories are instead seen by writers such as Butler and de Lauretis as the conditions of articulation for each other. Hence, de Lauretis' claim that: "Black women experience racism not as 'blacks' but as black women"\textsuperscript{81} and Evelynn Hammonds' observation that the homophobia experienced by black lesbians is always shaped by racism.\textsuperscript{82}

A Queer ethico-politics of difference, for Hammonds, must recognize that black lesbian sexuality cannot be understood outside its relation to black female sexuality. Black female sexuality, in turn, at least in European cultures, cannot be understood outside its relation to white female sexuality. Further, to Hammonds, the power relations and processes that shape public discourses on the sexuality of particular ethnic and racial groups need to be exposed. What needs to be

\textsuperscript{78} Butler, \textit{Bodies That Matter}, p.116.
\textsuperscript{79} Ibid., p.18. See also Cohen, op.cit., p.75.
\textsuperscript{80} de Lauretis, 'Sexual Indifference', p.164.
\textsuperscript{81} de Lauretis, 'Eccentric Subjects', p.134.
\textsuperscript{82} Hammonds, op.cit., p.136.
understood is the way these discourses work to produce and then exclude (or render silent and invisible) black sexualities at the same time as they construct a visible, 'healthy' white women's (hetero) sexuality.\textsuperscript{63}

Queer ethico-politics must, clearly, be based on an examination of the differential, hierarchical formation of sexualities through race, gender, class, colonial and other relations.\textsuperscript{64} For feminist philosophers like Rosi Braidotti, theories of difference must also incorporate the embodied condition of subjects, so that individuals are understood to be multiply and corporeally constituted across all of their variable (race, class, ethnic) axes. It is theoretical work which, for her, must necessarily take into account an 'imaginary' (unconscious) relationship of subjects to their history, genealogy and material conditions.\textsuperscript{65}

The new concern to identify the mutually constitutive effects of multiple axes of social differentiation, however, does not mean that analyses should be developed that pretend to encompass every vector of power. As Butler points out, to attempt to do so (even if this were possible) represents an epistemological imperialism, the familiar gesture and conceit of white Western male philosophy and its heirs. Rather, to Butler, the attempt to think contemporary power relations in their complexity will necessarily yield partial accounts where personal location and investment figure not as disqualifiers but as their necessary, limiting (and enabling) conditions.\textsuperscript{66}

These ethico-political imperatives have seen the production of critical works that also reflect on theoretical practice. In an essay on butch-femme sexual styles, Lisa Walker, for example, pauses for moments of critical self-interrogation at points where she recognizes her presumption of lesbianism as white. The tendency of her own work to erase racial differences in lesbian sexual styles signals

\textsuperscript{63} Ibid., pp.127-128,130-132,139.

\textsuperscript{64} Butler, \textit{Bodies That Matter}, pp.117,229. See Ien Ang's provocative questions to white Australian feminists whose particular construction of 'whiteness' in relation to Indigenous and Asian Australians in particular has hardly begun to be theorized. I. Ang, 'I'm a feminist but . . . 'Other' women and postnational feminism', in Caine and Pringle (eds), op.cit., pp.57-73.

\textsuperscript{65} Braidotti, \textit{Nomadic Subjects}, pp.146,156-157,165-166.

\textsuperscript{66} Butler, \textit{Bodies That Matter}, pp.18-19.
the lack of an effective theoretical apparatus with which to combine discussions of race and gender/sexuality in ways that do not catch us up in the paradigms we attempt to deconstruct, including the enactment of white privilege.\(^\text{87}\)

Walker goes on to suggest that the difficulty that white critics have in either maintaining a simultaneous discussion of race and lesbianism or of not privileging one identity over the other betrays two racist assumptions: the tendency to universalize white lesbian experience and a presumption that black lesbian writers' overriding concern is with issues of race. Both these assumptions contribute to the invisibility of lesbians of colour within the (white) lesbian community. Further, white writers tend to totalize the identity of the non-white 'other' such that, even when they are acknowledged, differences of sexual style within non-white lesbian cultures are overlooked.\(^\text{88}\)

Walker's discussion enacts an anti-racist ethico-politics of difference that white lesbian writers are increasingly taking up. For Shane Phelan, the practice of an ethico-politics of difference at the interpersonal level means that conversations with others take time: "They take time because we often need to stop and 'mark', or note, where a gap between us is due to cultural differences".\(^\text{89}\) At the political level, Phelan believes 'getting specific' about one's own locatedness can help identify allies at particular points for particular struggles. From this arises the possibility of coalitions which themselves require ongoing ethico-political work.

Similarly, for Braidotti and de Lauretis, a 'politics of location' can give rise to a practice of critical dialogue among many differently embodied subjects, unlike Hoagland's practice of 'attending' where substituting oneself for another in an empathetic dialogue might well constitute a colonizing gesture. Braidotti and de Lauretis anticipate that a critical dialogue will provide a better understanding of the specificity and partiality of individuals' respective genealogies, as well as reveal the stakes of some common struggles.\(^\text{90}\)


\(^{88}\) Ibid., pp.885-886.

\(^{89}\) Phelan, \textit{Getting Specific}, p.155. See also pp.155-156.

\(^{90}\) Braidotti, \textit{Nomadic Subjects}, pp.21,172; de Lauretis, 'Queer Theory', xi.
So far, this mapping of promising trajectories of an ethico-politics of difference has been concerned with relations between and within queer and lesbian subjects. But what of the broader political struggle against the normative regime of compulsory heterosexuality? As has become apparent in this thesis, an abiding feature of lesbian and gay 'activism over the past twenty five years has been the tension between a theoretical commitment to abandoning identity categories and a political imperative to affirm and assert gay and lesbian identities in the face of ongoing heterosexism. Most recently, that tension has manifested in the Queer problematization of coherent identity categories at the same time that the imperative for representational politics has intensified through the advent of AIDS.

Of all current theorists, Judith Butler seems the most preoccupied with this tension and how it may be negotiated by queer subjects. For Butler, it is not a matter of refusing liberal-democratic representational politics and its concomitant requirement of a stable subject. Indeed, for Butler, as for Halperin and Blasius, one of the urgent political tasks is to promote lesbians and gays as culturally viable subjects. But her parallel concern to resist a totalizing identification with the category 'lesbian' means that, on political occasions when she appears under the sign 'lesbian', in order to resist and contest homophobic political forces, she simultaneously wants to render permanently unclear what, precisely, 'lesbian' signifies. While this promotion of the 'strategic provisionality' of lesbian and other identities works to render them as "sites of disruption, error, confusion and trouble", Butler believes these provisional identities constitute "the very rallying points for a certain resistance to classification and to identity as such".  

Butler's ethico-politics of difference, then, consists of occupying those sites and 'using the sign' (making political use of identity categories) at the same time as subjecting them to democratic contestation. This demands the interrogation of the exclusionary moves through which subject positions and identity categories are constituted and assumed. It also means that identities must be constantly called to account for which

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91 Butler, 'Imitation and Gender Insubordination', p.16. See also pp.13-15,19-20; Butler, Gender Trouble, p.6; Butler, Bodies That Matter, pp.227,229-230,
differentiations are necessarily valorized or excluded in the process of their political consolidation. Gay and lesbian subjects must recognize that the apparent coherence of their identities is exacted and sustained at the cost of exclusion of heterosexuality and bisexuality. Such self-critical practice, according to Butler, is necessary if the rigid occupation of exclusionary identities and the regulatory imperatives this practice imposes on others are to be avoided and future resignifications of the category are not to be foreclosed.92

While Butler’s genealogical self-critique means acknowledging that one’s own identity is necessarily constituted in relation to (and against) others, she does not call for an avowal of one’s ‘other’. One cannot become the other or, rather, to attempt to become the other, as I noted in the context of lesbian ethics, represents to Butler a colonizing move. For Butler, exclusion and repudiation are the conditions for identity and its cultural viability. The democratizing contestation of identities must therefore comprise a practice of mapping their interrelations and reworking, though not fully overcoming, the exclusionary conditions of their production. For, if identity is not constituted once and for all, but is the effect of a constant performative reiteration, then the semblance of coherent ‘I’ is potentially contestable and renegotiable. It is this type of challenge to one’s own identity and the ‘risk of incoherence’ it carries, Butler concludes, that might well be the only way that connection and political alliance is possible.93

Contemporary gay, lesbian and Queer theories, while purportedly informed by post-structural theory and concerned with the question of difference, clearly manifest a capacity to reproduce the problematics of traditional Western philosophy. The constitution of gender and sexuality as autonomous and discrete analytic categories (a move designed to disrupt radical and lesbian feminism’s reduction of sexuality to gender), in Sedgwick’s account at least, is effected through recourse to binary conceptions, particularly the nature/culture distinction. This reinstatement of the binary epistemological framework of Western philosophy in the name of conceiving (gay male) difference, ironically (if not surprisingly),


reintroduces the problematic of sexual difference. Of particular concern for lesbians is the reappearance of a phallogocentrism which works to subsume lesbianism within the category of (implicitly male homo-) 'sexuality'. In this modality of Queer at least, radical and lesbian feminism's reduction of sexuality to gender has simply been replaced by the equally problematic subsumption of 'gender' within 'sexuality'.

'Becoming gay' has also been shown to be problematically constructed on the basis of Foucault's appropriation of an Enlightenment conception of subjectivity. While this conception overcomes the humanist problem of an 'essential' gay or lesbian subject, in practice becoming gay works to consolidate and valorize one of the self's multiple identities. I argued that this was an effect of both the singularizing logic at work in (male) Enlightenment subjectivity and of political necessity in the face on the ongoing persecution of deviant sexual subjects and communities. However, as my discussion reveals, becoming gay re-enacts the familiar phallocentric procedure of achieving the appearance of an autonomous, unified, singular identity through a form of violence (exclusion and disavowal) done to self and others. It is not surprising, then, that many lesbian writers working within a 'post-modern' sensibility maintain a critical distance from 'Queer'.

The writings of lesbians and lesbians/women of colour, because they are multiply marked as different to the (gender, racial) norm, work to disrupt Queer's tendency to slide into the familiar problem of difference. Their work encourages a viable coalitional politics built on a conception of a situated, embodied self which is multiply and corporeally constituted across a range of identifications. Rather than disavowing the constitutive interdependence of vectors of gender, race, class, sexuality, ethnicity and nationality, these writers are engaged in the task of determining how identities are constructed through hierarchical relations to others with a view to contesting and transforming them.

94 See Judith Butler's response to her assignation as a 'queer' theorist, for instance (J. Butler, 'Gender as Performance. An Interview with Judith Butler', Radical Philosophy 67, Summer 1994, p.32). Elizabeth Grosz identifies three of her essays as comprising a trilogy on queer sexuality and queer theory while at the same time characterizing 'queer', when unspecified, as a 'reactive' category in Nietzsche's sense (defining itself solely as opposition to the norm). See 'Experimental Desire' (Copjec version, pp.133,145).
CONCLUSION

This genealogy of lesbian feminism began with the question of how it was possible to pose lesbian sadomasochism as a problem of anti-feminism, and by what authority that determination could be made. I traced the line of descent of the problematization of s/m within lesbian feminism to the logical structures, conceptual formulations and norms of its constitutive discourses: Marxism and liberalism. Enlightenment and humanist precepts, when transposed to radical and lesbian feminism via Marxism and liberalism, were shown to reproduce Western philosophy's singularizing and totalizing logic of 'the same'. This internal logic compelled the production of radical and lesbian feminist discourses which promoted one organizing 'truth' (a metanarrative of 'patriarchy'), a privileged site of feminist struggle (sexuality), a privileged subject of feminist politics (variously figured as radical celibates and lesbians) and a singular political prescription to end women's oppression (total revolution). I argued that this logic was crucial to the formation of a lesbian feminist 'regime of truth' on sexuality which dominated feminist thinking for a time in the 1970s.

The problematization of lesbian s/m was traced to radical and lesbian feminism's founding norm of 'egalitarianism' which is itself formulated on the logic of the 'same'. The principle of identity (A=A) promotes the proposition that equivalent value and equal treatment should only be conferred on the basis of 'sameness': 'sameness' of power, 'sameness' of subjects, 'sameness' of status. Relations of difference (whether conceived as power/status differences between similar subjects or as relations between different subjects) can only be understood on this logic to constitute relations of domination. In the lesbian feminist context, these modernist principles underpinned the argument that those forms of lesbianism that evinced or enacted difference between 'same' (gendered) subjects - butch-femme and s/m relations, for example - were anti-egalitarian and therefore 'anti-feminist'. Lesbian feminism's dictum that sexual practice must conform to feminist (egalitarian) principles, added a coercive, disciplinary dimension to these categorical determinations.
The norm of egalitarianism was the condition for not only the problematization of s/m and butch-femme but also for the claim that lesbianism constituted a privileged form of feminism. The logic of the 'same' worked to render lesbian relationships as always-already 'equal' on the basis of the (gender) 'sameness' of the participants (except, of course, those forms which evinced 'difference'). The 'egalitarian' form of lesbianism (which emphasized equal power, sensuality, non-genital sexuality and so on) claimed for itself a privileged feminist status and promoted itself as a model feminist relationship. The status of lesbians as feminists par excellence was further consolidated by the articulation of a lesbian feminist 'repressive hypothesis' of sexuality in which it was claimed that the condition of patriarchy was the suppression of lesbianism. Lesbian feminists could then claim that the liberation of lesbians, or the liberation of the lesbian in all women through 'political lesbianism', would bring an end to patriarchy and women's oppression.

Lesbian feminists' claims to vanguard status within feminism were given further credence by the phallocentric binarisms of Western philosophy operating in radical and lesbian feminist discourses. Western philosophy's constitution of 'woman' as the secondary, derivative term to 'man' (and 'human') provided the discursive conditions for a claim that the 'human' (liberated) form of 'woman' was 'lesbian'. The 'already liberated' status of lesbians was shown to be figured on the notion of 'lesbian' as 'not-woman', a notion which itself can be traced to nineteenth century sexology's characterization of homosexuality as 'gender inversion'. In lesbian feminism's 'essentialist' (cultural feminist) mode, where 'woman' was reconstituted as the valorized term in the 'man'/woman' binary, the claim for lesbian supremacy was sustained through an argument that lesbians were quintessential women.

On the basis of the authority conferred by these multiple claims - claims that included lesbianism's status as ontologically egalitarian (at least in its 'egalitarian' forms); the insistence that sexual practice must conform to the feminist principle of egalitarianism which lesbianism (as a relation between the 'same') seemed to exemplify; lesbians as already liberated by virtue of being 'outside' patriarchal relations and systems of signification; a lesbian feminist 'repressive hypothesis' which promoted lesbianism as the counterforce to patriarchy - and the problematic status
of 'woman' vis-à-vis 'human' in the phallocentric discourses of Western philosophy, lesbians claimed a privileged status as feminists and demanded that all women become lesbians. And it was on the basis of that authority that the lesbian feminist 'regime of truth' on sexuality was established and maintained.

Lesbian feminism's 'regime of truth' on sexuality and its exercise of normative power in the name of that truth, however, also incited resistance. The emergence of 'sex radicals' and the 'sex wars' of the early 1980s signalled the moment when lesbian feminism's authority on sexuality was contested and destabilized. As a result, and despite attempts at redemption through articulating a 'lesbian ethics', lesbian feminism is now a marginal discourse within feminism and lesbian, gay and 'queer' theory. This reduced status was evidenced by the apparent exclusion of a lesbian feminist perspective from the 'Sexualities and Cultures' series of conferences held at the Australian National University in 1993.

But the resistive discourses of lesbian sadomasochism, themselves constituted through a variety of discursive elements ranging from Reichian sexual liberation, gay liberation and Foucauldian post-structuralism, produced contradictory effects. On the one hand, a 'repressive hypothesis' of s/m sexuality, introduced into s/m discourse by its sexual liberationist antecedents, reproduced the familiar problematics of gay liberation and lesbian feminism. These problematics included positing an 'essential' s/m sexuality and sexual identity which represented the (repressed) truth of the self, promoting a project of liberating that 'true' sexuality, and a claim to vanguard status of s/m practitioners on the grounds that s/m sexuality represented the counterforce to authoritarianism. S/m discourses also manifestly install a normative regime which disciplines its own subjects. On the other hand, certain innovations of s/m discourses - refusing an easy alignment of genitals, sexual practice, sexual identity and gender identity (confounding s/m discourses own singularizing tendencies), and the analytic separation of gender and sexuality - provided some of the key discursive conditions of Queer theory in the 1990s.
Twenty five years after the articulation of a lesbian feminist revolutionary programme, it is apparent that the promise of lesbian liberation and political lesbianism been not been, and will not be, realized. Rather than bringing down the patriarchal-capitalist order, it seems that 'coming out' has led, though not without some struggle, to lesbians and gay men being accommodated within present political arrangements to the extent that the state today, at least in Australia, generally functions as their protector and sometimes their advocate. A radical critique of these developments, which would view them as instances mere 'reformism' which leave the overarching power structures intact, misses entirely the point of how modern power operates.

From a Foucauldian perspective, these developments confirm the suspicion, registered in Chapter 2, that the whole 'anti-repressive' struggle is in fact implicated in the 'deployment of sexuality'. The repressive hypothesis of sexuality provided the motor for gay liberation, inciting a 'confessional' moment of 'coming out' on a mass scale through which homosexual subjects achieved a permanent and visible reality. Rather than a liberation from power, however, this 'moment' of gay liberation in the 1960s and 1970s represented a tactical shift in the deployment of sexuality. Changes in the meaning of homosexuality during this time (from 'sickness' to 'benign variation') have been accompanied by a shift in the mode of its regulation. Sexual liberty nowadays is conditional on the capacity for self-regulation of sexual practice. And there is no doubt that, for the individuals concerned, self-regulation is more desirable than regulation by criminal sanctions. But nowhere is the conditional nature of sexual liberty so transparent than in the struggle over the management of gay sexuality over the past decade in the context of AIDS. It is apparent that, in Australia at least, punitive state intervention was avoided through the gay community's initiative to install its own disciplinary regime around 'safe sex' practices. In this instance, visibility and geographical locatability provides the critical condition for the state's surveillance and assessment of the self-regulatory capacities of (still) 'deviant' subjects and communities.

In terms of the presumed revolutionary impact of 'coming out', it is also possible, as Jagose points out, that the visible presence of lesbians in fact sustains the very system it appears to rupture. Indeed, as I have
shown throughout this thesis, the characterization of lesbians as a
dangerous 'outside' to patriarchy is thoroughly implicated in the utopic
traditions of Western philosophy. The very condition of understanding
the lesbian to be 'not-woman' and 'outside' patriarchal systems of
signification can be traced to nineteenth century conceptions of
homosexuality as 'gender inversion'. However, it is precisely their
intelligibility as deviant subjects within patriarchal discourse that is the
condition for lesbians' exclusion from the dominant culture. It is from this
position as the abject, excluded 'other' of the normative (heterosexual)
category 'woman', that 'lesbian' does its work of stabilizing the
hierarchical relations between (heterosexual) men and women. How
'lesbian' is doing this work in the present moment, and how the meanings
and hierarchical relations of those categories might be changing, would
be a worthy subject of investigation.

Lesbian feminism's 'failure' as a revolutionary movement can, from a
Foucauldian perspective, also be understood to signal its own implication
in the disciplinary, normalizing power regimes working through
discourses of liberation. Located within the conceptual apparatus of
Western philosophy, through its Marxist and liberal antecedents, lesbian
feminism has most often operated to install, at a 'micro' level, a
normalizing 'regime of truth' on sexuality. Lesbian feminism, then, does
not subvert but is rather implicated in the type of power and forms of
subjection that Foucault sought to overcome. In concerning itself with the
task of determining and policing 'authentic' lesbian and feminist identity,
lesbian feminism became a casualty of power's 'essentialist' ruse. The
resultant (and desired) effect was the deflection of lesbian feminism's
attention away from a more radical enquiry into the political construction
and regulation of identity itself. So long as lesbian feminism continues to
refuse to deconstruct its own discursive regime and identity categories, it
will not be able to provide a site for the type of engaged, concrete
political struggles over sexual identities and regulatory practices that is
necessary for contemporary sexual politics.

Some of the major thematic concerns of this thesis - most particularly,
the 'problem of difference', the relationship between 'gender' and
'sexuality' and the tension between the projects of affirming and
decomposing sexual identities - have continued salience in the present
'queer' moment. I will review these one by one, highlighting what I believe are sites for further investigation.

The different moments of conflation or separation of the analytic categories 'gender' and 'sexuality' have marked critical points in the development of contemporary theories and politics of sexuality. The conceptual conflation of gender and sexuality was one of the conditions for radical and lesbian feminism; their separation was one of the conditions for sex radicalism and Queer theory. Both moves have proven to be problematic in different ways.

The conflation of gender and sexuality manifestly produced hierarchical and exclusionary effects along lines of gender (against men and male homosexuals) and sexual practice (against heterosexuality, bisexuality and forms of lesbian practice like s/m). But, in conjunction with other discursive elements in circulation at the time, the conflation of gender and sexuality also produced innovations such as the call to 'political lesbianism'. The whole notion of 'political lesbianism' can, from a 'postmodern' 1990s perspective, be seen as a quaint relic of a misguided past. But the fact remains that many women can track a personal history as heterosexual 'sexual liberationists' in the 1960s, lesbian feminists in the 1970s, sex radicals in the 1980s and 'queers' in the 1990s. This biographical evidence not only offers proof of the fluidity of desire, at least in the experience of a number of women, but can also be understood as an instance of the 'real' effects of discourse in organizing and reorganizing experiences of sexuality. This particular series of shifts in sexual identity also illustrates Foucault's contention that the repressive hypothesis and sexual taboos actually function to incite the forms of sexualization that power ostensibly prohibits. Further, the phenomena of political lesbianism and of shifting sexual identifications over a period of time (particularly in women, it seems) disrupts any totalizing claim about the 'naturalness' or fixity of desire, whether these claims are articulated from within lesbian, gay and queer theory or from within medical-psychiatric institutions. These biographies and the phenomenon of political lesbianism, therefore, deserve more serious consideration than has been given so far.
Different effects are produced in those moments where sexuality and gender are disarticulated and constituted as autonomous analytic categories, as in discourses informed by Foucault: for example, sex radicalism and queer theory. In these discourses, 'gender' tends to be subsumed within the category of (queer) 'sexuality', giving rise to a new set of hierarchical and exclusionary effects along lines of sexuality (thereby alienating queers of both genders from feminism) as well as gender. Of particular concern in this regard is the reappearance within Queer of a disavowal of gender (sexual difference) which in Western epistemology is the conventional way of signifying male-as-norm. This disavowal leads to the subsumption of lesbianism within (male) homosexuality and enables gay males to claim privileged status as Queers. Queer theory's tendency to disavow gender also has effects at the level of critical effectiveness, where it is unable to account for anything that requires a simultaneous consideration of gender including, most importantly, the binary construction of hetero- and homo- sexuality itself.

If present day feminists and queer theorists are not to keep reproducing these problematicas, this oscillating movement between the discursive conflation of gender and sexuality (for the sake of a feminist agenda) and the construction of 'sexuality' independently of 'gender' (for the sake of a gay male agenda) must be disrupted. I suggested that the ethico-political projects being elaborated by lesbian theorists and lesbians/women of colour through engagement with queer theory (even if this engagement takes place at a critical distance) disrupt this dynamic. Because they are multiply marked as different from the (male, heterosexual and racial) norms and because of their multiple and shifting positionings within gender, race and sexual politics, the work of these writers offers a necessary corrective to all these movements' singularizing tendencies. Their work exemplifies the 'postmodern' moment's contention of the 'impossibility' of a singular unified identity. Further, their refusal to attempt to construct for themselves a unified, coherent and stable identity represents a recognition, born out of experience of political movements over the past three decades, that the personal and political costs of attaining such an identity are too high.
But specifying 'lesbian' is also embroiled in its own problematics. Butler's reluctance to identify as a lesbian rests on the recognition of that category's implication in the regulatory regimes of sexuality operating both within liberation movements and in society at large. Yet she also recognizes that the assertion of gay and lesbian identity is politically necessary so long as individuals are oppressed on the basis of homosexuality. Butler's negotiation of the category of 'lesbian', formulated as a paradox of dependency and refusal, can itself be located within a longer-standing debate over whether sexual identities should be affirmed or deconstructed. The 'postmodern' negotiation of identity categories, represented in Butler's discussion, is however quite different to that of early gay liberation and feminism.

Early gay liberation and feminism's recognition of the socially constructed nature of 'woman' and 'homosexual' provoked a move to abolish gender and sexual categories on the basis of their 'falseness'. This project, resting on a series of conceptual oppositions (nature/culture, self/society, real/ideal, true/false), posited an 'authentic' ('human', polymorphous) subjectivity residing beneath a cultural overlay of gender, sexuality, race and class distinctions. Further, this project assumed that this 'real' self could be recuperated through overthrowing the political regime which produced such distinctions and thereafter lead an authentic ('undifferentiated') life outside the reach of power and social interventions.

The 'impossibility' of this project is now well understood, as is its colonizing impulse. The call to abolish identity categories has been replaced in the postmodern moment by a view of identity categories as 'technologies' through which individuals make sense of and organize their personal and political lives. These categories are both enabling and constraining, and manifestly shift and change in a mutually determining relation to social and political developments. The question then is not whether individuals should 'give up' identity categories (for there is no 'outside' to these cultural formations) but rather what is to be their relation to such categories.

As my discussion of the Queer moment showed, contemporary sexual politics can still take these identity categories to represent the true essence of the self. While asserting a singular, unified or naturalized identity may make sense politically, it reproduces effects of exclusion and
hierarchicalization amongst its own purported constituency (hence Butler's reservations). As a project built on a unified identity, 'becoming gay' does not interrogate the historical construction of homosexual identities and how those identities were and continue to be constructed at the cost of differently gendered/raced/classed/sexualized others. Not to undertake this critical interrogation reproduces, rather than contests and transforms, hierarchical relations between contemporary sexual subjects, to which the continuing conflicts at those sites within Queer attest.

Butler's and Phelan's more considered approaches propose that if identity categories must be asserted politically then they must also be subject to continual democratic contestation. Particularly, the exclusionary moves through which subject positions and identities are constructed must be interrogated and called to account for their personal and political costs. Through this 'ethos of permanent critique', these writers imagine that any moves to solidify and stabilize identity categories will be disrupted. They imagine a fluid politics of sexuality comprising of contingent coalitions, and contested and constantly resignified identity categories.

Events have already begun to overtake the careful articulation of such projects, however. The Queer moment has seen gender and sexual categories multiply and reconfigure themselves in complex and often confounding ways, such that the oppositional categories of male/female and heterosexual/homosexual are becoming increasingly redundant, at least on the sexual fringes of society. This present moment of proliferating sexualities itself must be taken as both resistance to and an instance of the 'deployment of sexuality'. Hence, while new sexualities cannot claim any greater libratory potential than older forms, they nevertheless work against normalizing moves to consolidate and stabilize singular identity categories.

In this context of 'postmodern' and 'queer' identities, a Foucauldian ethics, resting on an Enlightenment understanding of autonomous and coherent (masculine) subjectivity, is (ironically) highly problematic. Foucault's ethics manifestly rests on a self/society dualism in which the always-already cultural embeddeness of subjectivity is disavowed. Accordingly, the project of 'becoming gay', in the tradition of Western philosophy, evinces a blind spot in regard to both its constitutive
dependency on relations of gender, race, ethnicity and class, amongst others, and its subjects' multiple positionings in those relationships.

Again I cite the writings of lesbians and lesbians/women of colour as a necessary corrective to Foucault, at least in his Enlightenment mode, and to those moves inspired by Foucault to constitute gender and sexuality as autonomous analytic categories. These writers maintain that the categories of gender, race, sexuality, class, ethnicity and so on are not autonomous but are mutually constitutive in ways that reproduce hierarchical social ordering. Exposing the discursive and institutional mechanisms through which these mutually constitutive social relations produce their asymmetric effects is a task that must be undertaken in order to disrupt and transform those relations.

Further, against the tendency of Queer to constitute lesbianism as a category of (male homo-) sexual identification, the writings of lesbians and lesbians/women of colour work to recuperate lesbianism as a site of feminist identification and gender contestation, but in a way that does not reproduce the problematics of lesbian feminism. To posit a mutually constitutive relationship of sexuality to gender is not to reduce sexuality to an effect of gender. Rather, it is precisely because of its continuing Western cultural currency as a category of gender non-conformity within a regulatory regime of sexual and gender norms that lesbianism gains its political significance as a site of female (as well as sexual) dissent. From a more modest position as one of many 'eccentric' subjects, a lesbian identification which also takes into account the self's multiple social positionings offers a site for other possible ways to be gendered, raced and so on.

I have argued that the work of writers like Butler, Phelan, Diprose, Pratt, Grosz, Walker and Hammonds enacts these necessary critical interrogations of identity and suggests the sorts of practices that for them are crucial for the democratic negotiation of differences. In engaging in the task of determining how identities are constructed through hierarchical relations to others with a view to contesting and transforming those relations, the work of these writers points the way to the necessary ethical-political work that now needs to be done.


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IDENTITY, DIFFERENCE AND THE 'OTHER':

a genealogical investigation of lesbian feminism,
the 'sex wars' and beyond

Carolyn Williams

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PLEASE NOTE

The greatest amount of care has been taken while scanning this thesis,

and the best possible result has been obtained.
ABSTRACT

This thesis is an investigation into lesbian feminism from its emergence in the late 1960s to its present day form and relationship to current theories and politics of sexuality. It participates in the new interrogations of homosexual politics and identities by lesbian, gay and 'queer' theorists most influenced by or closely allied with Foucault's genealogy of sexuality. The primary focus of the thesis is an analysis of the discursive conditions of the 'sex wars': a moment in feminist politics (the early 1980s in the U.S.) in which contestations over sexuality - specifically, what constitutes 'feminist' and 'anti-feminist' sexual practice - became the central focus of feminist debate. In particular, I ask how it was possible for lesbian sadomasochism to be problematized as an 'anti-feminist' sexual practice within discourses of lesbian feminism.

I argue that through their constitutive 'parent' discourses, Marxism and liberalism, radical and lesbian feminism were committed to a modernist logic which compelled the production of 'regimes of truth'. Within lesbian feminism, this regime promoted a certain construction of 'lesbian' as a privileged form of feminist at the same time as it problematized lesbian sadomasochism. Drawing on feminist and post-structural critiques of Western philosophy, this problematization of lesbian sadomasochism is traced to Enlightenment and humanist logics and precepts operative within feminist, lesbian feminist and gay liberationist discourses. The tendency of modernist discourses to produce singular, exclusionary identity categories and a hierarchical ordering of subject positions is also found to be present within the ostensibly 'postmodern' discourse of contemporary 'queer' theory.

On the basis of this genealogical investigation of lesbian feminism, it is the contention of this thesis that the work of lesbian writers like Judith Butler, Shane Phelan and Teresa de Lauretis disrupts the modernist logic of the 'one' operative in both lesbian feminism and 'queer' theory and points to the theoretical and political work that needs to be done. I suggest that the most urgent task facing current lesbian, gay and 'queer' theorists is the elaboration of an ethico-politics of difference, one that is attentive to the mutually constitutive multiple differences within and between subjects.
CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.................................................................................................................. 1

CHAPTER 1. THE INVENTION OF THE MODERN HOMOSEXUAL........ 14
   I. The Emergence of the Modern Homosexual
   II. Regulation and Social Repression of Homosexuality
   III. Resistance

CHAPTER 2. SEXUAL POLITICS IN THE 60s: FEMINISM AND GAY LIBERATION .................................................. 51
   I. The Conditions of Emergence of Gay Liberation
   II. Gay Liberation and Lesbian Feminism
   III. Gay Liberation and the Repressive Hypothesis

CHAPTER 3. EARLY RADICAL FEMINISM AND LESBIAN SUPREMACY... 86
   I. The Epistemological Foundations of Marxism and Liberalism
   II. The Master Narrative of Radical Feminism
   III. The Ascendance of Lesbian Feminism

CHAPTER 4. CULTURAL FEMINISM AND THE 'TRUE' LESBIAN.......... 127
   I. The Epistemological Conditions of Cultural Feminism
   II. The Master Narrative of Cultural Feminism
   III. The Maintenance of Lesbian Supremacy within Cultural Feminism

CHAPTER 5. THE LESBIAN 'SEX WARS': LESBIAN SADOmasochism AS ANTI-FEMINISM........ 167
   I. The Emergence of Lesbian S/M
   II. The Lesbian Feminist Case against Lesbian Sadomasochism
   III. The Discourses of Lesbian S/M

CHAPTER 6. LESBIAN FEMINISM'S ETHICAL TURN........................................ 210
   I. Foucault's Ethics
   II. Radical and Lesbian Feminism as Disciplinary Moral Codes
   III. Lesbian Ethics as an Aesthetics of Existence

CHAPTER 7. THE QUEER MOMENT.......................................................... 246
   I. The Queer Subject of Sexuality
   II. Becoming Gay/Becoming Lesbian
   III. Thinking Through Difference

CONCLUSION............................................................................................................... 280

BIBLIOGRAPHY........................................................................................................... 290
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CERTIFICATE

This work has not previously been submitted for a higher degree at any other institution. The work contained in this thesis is entirely my own except for references to the works of others as indicated in the text.

Signed .................................................

Date .............................................. 21-10-96
INTRODUCTION

Lesbian feminism, as a political movement and a body of knowledge, is problematically represented in accounts of 'second wave' feminism. In popular introductory texts such as Rosemary Tong's *Feminist Thought. A Comprehensive Introduction*, Alison Jaggar's *Feminist Politics and Human Nature* and Chris Weedon's *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory*, lesbian feminism is accorded little more than a cursory and sometimes dismissive reference. Writing in 1983, after more than a decade of lesbian feminist theorizing, Jaggar for example could nevertheless assert that "lesbian feminism has not yet developed a distinctive and comprehensive theory of women's liberation".¹ This failure to confer epistemological status on lesbian feminism most often results in its taxonomical definition as a subset of radical feminism in these accounts.

More polemical accounts of second wave feminist theory and the women's movement, for example Hester Eisenstein's *Contemporary Feminist Thought*, Lynne Segal's *Is the Future Female? Troubled Thoughts on Contemporary Feminism* and Alice Echols' *Daring to be Bad. Radical Feminism in America 1967-1975*, offer more substantial expositions and analyses of radical and lesbian feminism, and their relationship to each other, through a narrative of their ultimate and politically fatal collapse into essentialism. Dismissed by most feminist commentators as discourses promoting the biological determination of sexual difference and women's oppression, it seemed there was nothing more to say about radical and lesbian feminism.

The impetus for this thesis is my belief that there is indeed more that can be said about radical and lesbian feminism. The new analytic perspectives opened up by post-structuralist theory have allowed a re-interrogation of problems previously foreclosed by the charge of 'essentialism'. Diana Fuss, for example, announces a new line of enquiry on essentialism through the question "if this text is essentialist, what motivates its deployment?"² (her emphasis). Similarly, Judith Butler,

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² D. Fuss, *Essentially Speaking. Feminism, Nature and Difference*, New York and London, Routledge, 1989, xi. However, Fuss also makes the problematic claim that lesbian scholarship tends on the whole to be more essentialist than gay male theory (p.98).
following Foucault, is concerned to expose the contingency of what appears 'natural', and in particular the political stakes in designating as 'essential', categories ('woman' and 'lesbian' for instance) which are in fact power's 'knowledge effects'.

This current 'post-structural' problematization and re-interrogation of the essentialist identity categories on which contemporary liberation projects have been built owes much to Foucault's genealogy of 'sexuality' presented in *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*. Foucault's genealogy profoundly unsettles and denaturalizes the identity categories unproblematically asserted by activists within, and commentators on, the contemporary lesbian and gay liberation movements. Foucault's work instead demonstrates how accounts may be written which historicize those identities and politicize sexuality and gender in ways quite different to those imagined by liberation theorists. It is Foucault's genealogical approach to sexual identities and politics, then, which is the condition of possibility for my re-examination of lesbian feminism.

This thesis participates in these new interrogations of homosexual identities by lesbian, gay and 'queer' historians. It initially draws on a field of lesbian and gay historical studies generated by writers such as Jeffrey Weeks, Lillian Faderman, Sheila Jeffreys, Barry Adam and John D'Emilio. However, its concerns are generated in the present moment of gay, lesbian and 'queer' politics where it is most aligned and engaged with the works of theorists like Judith Butler, Shane Phelan, Teresa de Lauretis, Biddy Martin and Diana Fuss. One concern is balancing the project of deconstructing lesbian and gay identity categories initiated by genealogical studies against the pragmatic political necessity to organize as homosexuals against those forces that seek the cultural, if not literal, extermination of homosexual communities and identities. Another is the pressing need to develop ways to theorize and negotiate differences within and between contemporary subjects of sexual politics in ways that do not replicate the bitter divisiveness that has characterized the feminist, lesbian and gay movements over the past twenty five years.

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This genealogy of lesbian feminism and lesbian feminist identities begins with questions posed in the present, questions which arise from this fraught history of contemporary liberation movements. The central problem of this investigation was suggested through an accident of history: the events surrounding the controversial 1993 'Regimes of Sexuality' conference held at the Australian National University in Canberra. This conference was the subject of protest by lesbian feminists on grounds of both its content and the inclusion of speakers (including self-styled 'sex radicals') who were either advocates of, or took a liberal position on, sadomasochistic (s/m) sexual practice and pornography, amongst other things. It seemed the feminist 'sex wars' had arrived in Australia.

The term 'sex wars' refers to a moment in feminist politics (the early 1980s in the U.S. and Britain, and the late 1980s and early 1990s in Australia) in which contestations of sexuality - specifically, the question of what constitutes 'feminist' and 'anti-feminist' sexual practice - became the central focus of feminist debate. One constitutive condition and ongoing effect of the sex wars is an unbridgeable gap between lesbian feminists and 'sex radicals' which sometimes manifests in periodic outbursts of public antagonism. The 'sex wars' in Australia, while relatively low-key in comparison to overseas experience, nevertheless for me worked to render 'strange' and problematic what had previously gone without saying: the 'self evidence' of categories of 'feminist' and 'anti-feminist' sexual practice. In particular, it was no longer clear to me how lesbian sadomasochism is 'anti-feminist'.

One of the major concerns of this genealogical enquiry, then, is the question of how it was possible to pose s/m as a problem of anti-feminism and by what authority that determination could be made. This enquiry also seeks to ascertain the stakes in this determination that allowed such a bitter antagonism between the protagonists to be generated and sustained. Further, this enquiry elucidates how sexuality and sexual practice came to be accorded such a central place in radical and lesbian feminist theory that it was possible to have a 'war' over

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4 For an account of these events, see Footnote 8 in Chapter 5.

sexual practice at all, and that this 'war' could become the dominating concern of feminism for a time.

Answering these questions involves tracing the line of descent in radical and lesbian feminism that has led to the problematization of sexuality and s/m in particular, a genealogical exercise which must necessarily identify radical and lesbian feminism's discursive lineage. Identifying this lineage in turn necessitates an enquiry into the social, political and discursive conditions which marked the emergence of American radical and lesbian feminism in the late 1960s. As unique historical formations emerging from those conditions, radical and lesbian feminism are revealed through a genealogical analysis to be assemblages of disparate and sometimes contradictory discursive elements and practices. This historically contingent assemblage provided the conditions for both the articulation of lesbian feminism (as a body of knowledge and a political practice) and the discursive problematization of sadomasochistic sexual practice.6

As I show in this thesis, the problematization of lesbian sadomasochism and the subsequent emergence of the sex wars can be traced to radical and lesbian feminism's internal 'modernist' (Enlightenment and humanist) logic, inherited from their constitutive 'parent' discourses: Marxism and liberalism. I draw on feminist and poststructural critiques of Western philosophy to highlight those features of modernist thought that make possible the claim that sadomasochism is an 'anti-feminist' practice. Pre-eminent amongst these is the logical compulsion of all discourses informed by Enlightenment and humanist precepts to produce what Foucault calls a 'regime of truth'.7 I take lesbian feminism's 'regime of truth' to consist of a metanarrative which promotes one organizing truth (an account of the historical subjection of women through the suppression of lesbian possibility), one privileged site of feminist struggle (sexuality), one privileged subject of feminist politics (the lesbian) and one programmatic prescription (the overthrow of patriarchy through all women becoming lesbian).


Central to this singularizing logic of Western philosophy is what its post-structural and feminist critics have termed the 'problem of difference': the tendency to reduce all 'difference' to the 'same'. This problem is generated by Western philosophy's conceptual incapacity to conceive of difference other than in terms of its reduction to either a version, or negative derivation, of the 'one': the primary, normative term of the binary pair to which the secondary 'different' term conceptually belongs. The problem of difference constitutes the major thematic concern of this thesis, not only because of its implication in the sex wars, but also because of its centrality to ongoing conflicts within contemporary feminist and lesbian/gay politics.

Besides demonstrating the exclusionary and divisive effects of the 'problem of difference' at the level of sexual, race, class and other differences between lesbians, I argue that a coherent lesbian feminist identity constructed through the same singularizing logic produced its own exclusions and dominative relations. As I show, these constructions proceeded through a discursive dividing practice which valorized a particular construction of 'lesbian' as feminist par excellence while at the same time disqualifying other subject positions and identities including, most particularly for my purposes, that of lesbian sadomasochists. What is at stake in this ongoing antagonism between lesbian feminists and 'sex radicals', then, is lesbian feminism's 'regime of truth' and its coherence and stability as an identity. But, as I argue, what is also at stake is the coherence and stability of sex radicals' identity.

A crucial element in the constitution of sadomasochism as an 'anti-feminist' practice is lesbian feminism's conceptual reduction of sexuality to an effect of gender, a reduction again produced by the singularizing logic of radical and lesbian feminist discourses. The effect of this reduction is an asymmetric conflation of gender and sexuality, where sexuality and sexual practice are subsumed within a feminist agenda. This asymmetric conflation of gender and sexuality manifests as a lesbian feminist dictum that sexual practice must conform to feminist principles of egalitarianism. In this formulation of 'feminist' sexual practice, difference, and power difference in particular (the ritualization of which is a defining feature of s/m practice), is anathema. This insistence
of the conformation of sexual practice with 'feminist' principles also underpins the claim that 'true' feminists must necessarily be lesbian, or must make a choice to become lesbian (political lesbianism). A further thematic concern of this thesis therefore is the relationship between 'gender' and 'sexuality', in particular, how their various moments of conceptual conflation and disarticulation mark significant shifts in contemporary sexual theory and politics.

The problematization of s/m within lesbian feminism is imbricated in other modernist problematics whose effects within radical and lesbian feminist theory this thesis also thematizes and explores. The very possibility of a lesbian feminist 'regime of truth' on sexuality, for example, is shown to be implicated in an Enlightenment-inspired quest for transcendent truth. This impulse to transcendence translates, in its lesbian feminist context, into a 'lesbian utopias'.\(^8\) The possibility of taking lesbianism to be a mode of female existence 'outside' patriarchal relations of domination was central to lesbian feminism's 'truth claims' on sexuality. Another modernist problematic, the 'repressive hypothesis' of sexuality (where power is understood to repress sexual libido), was reworked by lesbian feminists to produce a claim that the repression of lesbianism is the condition of patriarchy. Together, these formulations provided the discursive resources for articulating the case for lesbian vanguardism and political lesbianism, and authorized lesbian feminism's dominance of feminist thinking on sexuality for a time in the 1970s.

The articulation of lesbian feminism is, then, demonstrably an (albeit disavowed) exercise of productive power. As a project of constructing and reconstructing lesbian identities in resistance to patriarchal femininity, lesbian feminism can be understood to function as a 'technology of gender' in Teresa de Lauretis's sense.\(^9\) This technology not only produces 'truth' claims and its correlate relations of domination but also produces resistance. Or, as Foucault famously put it: "Where there is power, there is resistance".\(^10\) Accordingly, in this thesis the sex wars are taken to represent a moment (perhaps the moment) where

\(^8\) This is Annamarie Jagose's term (Lesbian Utopias, New York and London, Routledge, 1994).


lesbian feminism's 'regime of truth' was successfully contested and destabilized and the field of sexuality opened to new directions in thinking.

As a resistive move against both the normalizing operations of lesbian feminism's 'regime of truth' on sexuality and the state's persecution of sexual minorities such as sadomasochists, the emergence of the 'sex radical' movement and discourses of s/m are themselves taken as instances of productive power. In self-consciously deploying the same discursive manoeuvres and political strategies as earlier sexual liberation movements (specifically, gay liberation), discourses of lesbian s/m are shown to reproduce the problematics of their antecedents and to demonstrate a tendency to generate their own 'regimes of truth' on sexuality. However, certain discursive innovations of lesbian s/m, particularly the conceptual separation of gender and sexuality, are in turn shown to provide one of the conditions of possibility for the emergence of 'queer theory' in the 1990s.

Given my analysis of both lesbian feminist and lesbian sadomasochist identities as forged through contestations over the meaning of lesbian or sadomasochistic sexual practices, a final thematic concern of this thesis is that of identity. Like Arlene Stein, I figure the history of lesbian feminism over the past 25 years as one of engagement in "a series of identity reconstructions which are partial and strategic". Lesbian feminist and lesbian sadomasochist identities, along with those of individuals who identify themselves as homosexuals, are shown to be shifting and changing in relation to struggles and developments both within feminism and in the broader social and political context. Yet this 'postmodern' understanding of the historic contingency of identities does not necessarily reflect the self-understandings of contemporary gay and lesbian subjects, many of whom take their homosexuality to be both 'natural' and to constitute the central defining truth of their self (their 'identity'). This thesis therefore begins with an elucidation of the conditions for these contemporary subjects' self-understanding as a lesbian or gay person. And, because of their implication in the same discursive process, this exercise necessarily dovetails with an elucidation

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of the conditions for understanding lesbianism as a privileged site of feminist activity. A genealogy of both formulations leads back to nineteenth century sexology.

Chapter One elaborates the framework of understanding identities and subjectivity outlined above in the context of Foucault's concept of a 'deployment of sexuality'. Its starting point is what Jennifer Terry has termed a 'deviant historiography', a mapping of the "complex discursive and textual operations at play in the historical emergence of subjects who come to be called lesbians and gay men".12 The category of homosexuality is shown to have been historically constituted in nineteenth century medico-legal discourses as the necessary correlate of normative categories of heterosexual masculinity and femininity. Because of its later salience to contemporary sexual politics, and the ascendance of lesbian feminism in particular, the dominant sexological formulation of homosexuality as gender non-conformity is highlighted. Sexology's pathologizing discourses of homosexuality, through which the deviant personage - 'the homosexual' - was constructed, are shown to be the condition not only for the punitive regulation of homosexual behaviour but also for homosexual community formation, collective political identity and organized resistance.

Against this background, Chapter Two traces the emergence of the modern feminist, gay and lesbian movements from the social, political and discursive conditions of the mid-twentieth century. Here I show how the liberatory and emancipatory discourses circulating in the American civil rights, anti-colonial and New Left movements, along with discourses of sexual liberation, were turned to a radical politics of gender and sexuality. These discursive conditions, along with shifts in the modes of regulation of sexuality, together enabled a radical contestation of nineteenth century sexology (and its twentieth century heirs) such that homosexuality could be conceived of as a positive identity, and even a revolutionary subject position. My particular concern is tracking the emergence of radical feminism from the American New Left in the late 1960s, and the subsequent formation of lesbian feminism from both radical feminism and gay liberation. This chapter also introduces the first

of the analytic themes of this thesis - the 'repressive hypothesis' of sexuality - and identifies some of its effects within early gay liberation.

Chapter 3 initiates a detailed interrogation of radical and lesbian feminist theory of the late 1960s and early 1970s. I show how the transposition of Marxist (and less centrally, liberal) precepts to radical feminism worked to constitute sexuality as the central site of radical feminist analysis. Because of their 'phallocentrism', these precepts also worked to produce highly problematic analyses of women's oppression and prescriptions for liberation. In particular, I show how the problematic status of 'woman' vis-à-vis 'human' in the conceptual system of Western philosophy could be worked into an argument that the 'human' form of 'woman' is 'lesbian'. This, along with a Marxist-inspired reformulation of gender role theory, a 'repressive hypothesis' of lesbian sexuality and a lesbian 'utopics', provided the basis for calls to political lesbianism and claims that lesbians were the natural constituents of a feminist vanguard. This chapter also introduces the major theme of the rest of this thesis - the 'problem of difference' - and identifies some of its effects in early radical and lesbian feminism.

Chapter 4 focuses on a shift in radical and lesbian feminist thought in the mid-1970s generated in response to the problematics of earlier formulations. 'Cultural' feminism, as this 'essentialist' moment in radical and lesbian feminism came to be known, incorporated both newly popularized narratives of ancient matriarchies and discourses promoting the natural differences between the sexes. This discursive move prompted a dramatic revision of radical and lesbian feminist projects in which the construction of a specifically female identity and counter-culture took priority. I argue, however, that because cultural feminism's construction of sexual difference was articulated through the binary framework of Western philosophy, the problem of difference, ironically, remained.

Given lesbians' previous claim to constitute feminists *par excellence* on the grounds of being 'not-women', another major concern of this chapter, therefore, is to ascertain how claims to lesbian supremacy were sustained and promoted through a discourse that celebrated traditional notions of 'woman'. I argue that in this regard the writings of Mary Daly
and other cultural lesbian feminists worked to refigure 'lesbian' as the quintessential 'woman'. This chapter also shows how the construction of 'essential' sexual difference found an analogue in the assertion of a particular construction of 'lesbian' to represent the 'true' lesbian feminist. I argue that it was cultural feminism's promotion of these norms of 'woman' and 'lesbian', and the normalizing practices deployed in their name, that precipitated the 'sex wars' of the early 1980s.

Chapter 5 stages the debate on lesbian sadomasochism primarily through the writings of Gayle Rubin and Sheila Jeffreys. I characterize the relationship between lesbian feminists like Jeffreys and self-styled 'sex radicals' like Rubin not only as one of power and resistance but also as one of discursive dependency through sex radicals' constitution as lesbian feminism's 'other'. One of the implications of this, I argue, is lesbian feminism's constitutive effect on discourses and practices of contemporary lesbian sadomasochism. I also argue that, in defining itself against radical and lesbian feminism, and deploying discursive and political strategies derived from the gay liberation movement, 'sex radicalism' reintroduced many of the problematics identified in Chapters 3 and 4. As well as identifying these, and some problems in Foucault's modes of resistance to normative sexual regimes, this chapter also highlights the innovations in sex radical discourses which provided some of the key discursive conditions for 'queer theory' of the 1990s.

Chapter 6 looks at the 'ethical turn' taken by lesbian feminism in the late 1980s in the aftermath of the 'sex wars'. Drawing on Foucault's later works, I use his distinction between a normalizing moral code and an 'aesthetics of existence' to characterize the relationship between pre- and post- 'sex wars' lesbian feminism. I argue that Sarah Lucia Hoagland's self-conscious elaboration of a 'lesbian ethics' against the disciplinary regime of pre-'sex wars' radical and lesbian feminism nevertheless works to re-install lesbian feminism's 'regime of truth'. But I also argue that Foucault's ethics, elaborated on an Enlightenment conception of subjectivity, itself contains a singularizing, phallocentric logic. Engaging with feminist critics, I argue that Foucault's ethics is a highly problematic basis for the elaboration of both a feminist ethics and an ethico-politics of difference.
The major thematic concern of this thesis, the problem of difference, re-emerges in Chapter 7 as the dominating theme in the current 'queer' moment in lesbian and gay theory. Cognizant of the modernist discursive conditions of this problematic, and of the history of conflict and exclusion it has generated in contemporary liberation movements, Queer constitutes itself as its 'postmodern' corrective. My task in this chapter therefore is to not only identify the discursive, social and political conditions for the emergence of 'Queer' in the 1990s, but also to ascertain whether Queer represents a discourse and practice of difference.

Through a symptomatic reading of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's 'Axioms' of anti-homophobic analysis, presented in Epistemology of the Closet, I offer an argument that the attempt to construct a fully autonomous analytic category of 'sexuality', based on the disarticulation of 'gender' and 'sexuality', can only be effected through the binary epistemological framework of Western philosophy. The category 'sexuality', formulated through a radical disavowal of 'gender' (sexual difference) reinstalls the problem of difference within Queer, or at least within some of its modes. This is most evident in the phallocentric subsumption of lesbian specificity within a gay male discourse which demonstrates a tendency to promote itself readily and unproblematically as a universal 'Queer' category. Similarly, I will be arguing that Foucault's project of 'becoming gay', when taken up by gay male writers in particular, works to consolidate a singular, unified gay identity at the cost of its 'others'. The chapter concludes with an argument for pursuing the type of ethico-politics of difference presently being elaborated by writers like Judith Butler and Shane Phelan.

Because of my focus on the genealogy and discursive logic of anglophone (particularly U.S.) theoretical debates around sexual politics, while I sometimes register a concern with the broader social/political context, my discussion generally does not consider the important work being done by gay and lesbian activists around law reform, political representation and so on. Those particular, and ongoing, struggles are outside the ambit of this study, as are developments in feminist politics other than those of radical and lesbian feminism.
This thesis also necessarily focuses on radical and lesbian feminism and sex radicalism as it has been elaborated in the U.S. With few exceptions, American writers have produced the seminal radical and lesbian feminist works which have then been taken up by their British and Australian counterparts. Where I have been able to find documentary evidence and writings of Australian radical and lesbian feminists, I have made reference to them. Without the benefit of a published comprehensive history of the Australian women's movement, however, it has been difficult to identify the different local conditions that may have modified the trends and debates outlined in this thesis, and impacted on their relative importance and intensity. Accordingly, I can only say for now that, from the local documentation that is available, it seems that radical and lesbian feminism tracked a similar course in Australia as in the U.S., though with some differences in timing.

Finally, to make what is now a standard announcement in Foucauldian-inspired accounts, I am not concerned in this thesis with accounting for homosexual desire. Where I briefly refer to desire, the discussion is in terms of how it is understood by and spoken about through the discourses of radical/lesbian feminism, sex radicalism and Queer. This does not mean that I take desire to be 'natural' or otherwise unproblematicizable but, rather, that a consideration of this question is well beyond the scope of this study.

My purpose here is to track certain problematics, identified through the debate on lesbian sadomasochism, through twenty five years of sexual politics, specifically through radical and lesbian feminism. On the way, I note appearances and disappearances of other less central problematics and their discursive and practical effects. These problematics include conflicting conceptions of the sexuality to be liberated by gay liberation, feminism and lesbian feminism (polymorphous or more specific forms), and conflicting conceptions of subjectivity contained in liberation projects (always-already 'there' or to be 'created').

A broader function of this genealogy is to unsettle monolithic representations of lesbian feminism found in many texts, specifically its characterization as only promoting an essentialist view of sexual
difference. On the basis of this genealogy, I will suggest that the most urgent task facing current lesbian, gay and 'queer' theorists is the elaboration of an ethico-politics of difference, one that is attentive to the mutually constitutive multiple differences within and between subjects. It is my hope that this thesis will add further momentum to moves in this direction.